Polyglot Identities

Cultural Negotiations,
Linguistic Ties and Social Belongings
of Avid Language Learners

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Globalisaatio on lisännyt kulttuurienvälisiä kohtaamisia: ihmiset liikkuvat enemmän ja media ulottuu aina vain laajemmalle. Tämä globaali kehitys on myös laajentanut mahdollisuuksia kielten oppimiseen. Ilmiönä polyglottius on voimistunut erityisesti internetissä.

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan, miten nykyajan polyglotit neuvottelevat ja muovaavat identiteettejään erilaisissa kulttuurisissa ja yhteiskunnallisissa konteksteissa oppiessaan, käyttäessään ja harrastaessaan kieliä. Tavoitteena on ymmärtää, miten kiintymyssuhteet kieliin kietoutuvat polyglottien identiteetteihin. Keskeisenä teemana ovatkin polyglottien kielille antamat merkitykset sekä niiden kytkökset laajempiin sosiokulttuurisiin (valta)rakenteisiin. Tutkielmassa avataan polyglottien tunnetta kodista ja kuulumisesta johonkin globaalistuvassa maailmassa samoin kuin kielitaidon, -siteiden ja -tietoisuuden merkitystä näissä transnationaalisissa ja kulttuurienvälisissä kokemuksissa.

Tutkielman aineisto koostuu 98 kyselyvastauksesta, jotka on kerätty kahdesta kirjoittajan laatimasta, Facebookin seitsemään polyglottiaiheiseen ryhmään lähettämästä kyselystä. Aineistoa eritellään ja merkityksellistetään temaattisen sisällönanalyysin keinoin sekä tulkitaan kulttuurintutkimukselle ominaisella monitieteellisellä otteella. Polyglotti-ilmiötä ja siihen liittyviä diskursseja käsitteellistetään ja kontekstualisoidaan. Tällainen kontekstualisoiva lähestymistapa mahdollistaa myös itse kieliin liittyvien asenteiden ja ideologioiden avaamisen.

Polyglottius harrastuksena ja elämäntapana on saanut vauhtia erityisesti internetistä. Se perustuu kielten intohimoiseen ja omaehtoiseen oppimiseen ja yhdistää kulttuuritaustoiltaan erilaisia ihmisiä ympäri maailman. Polyglottien siteet niin ensimmäiseen kuin myöhemmin opittuihin kieliin ovat tunnelataukseltaan vaihtelevia ja moniulotteisia, jälkimmäiset usein äidinkieltä jännittävämpiä. Vaikka polyglottien kieli- ja kansallisuustausta, asuinpaikka sekä sosioekonominen asema vaihtelevat, heidän kielellisissä sitoumuksissaan ja tottumuksissaan on samanlaisia vuorovaikutuksellisia, performatiivisia ja narratiivisia piirteitä. Juuri identiteettinarratiivit tekevät kielellisistä kehityskuluista merkityksellisiä ja johdonmukaisia elämäntarinoita, joita polyglotit voivat halutessaan muotoilla uudelleen. Kielelliset investoinnit voivatkin tarjota polygloteille tuoreita ja usein mieluisampia identiteettivaihtoehtoja. Yksi tällainen on jo nimitys ”polyglotti”, joka herättää arvostusta ja erottaa heidät muista.

Kiinnostus kieliin ja niiden osaaminen ylittävät kulttuurisia ja kansallisia rajoja, mikä heijastuu useiden polyglottien moninaisiin ja osin ristiriitaisiin kuulumisen tunteisiin verkottuneessa maailmassa. Useimmiten he kaipaavat ja pyrkivät poikkikielelliseen vuorovaikutukseen kansainvälisesti, paikallisesti tai virtuaalisesti. Kielitaito ja -siteet avartavat ja vahvistavat polyglottien globaalia tietoisuutta, joka on kasvualusta maailmankansalaisuudelle ja kulttuurienväliselle neuvottelulle.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
polyglotti, identiteetti, monikielisyys, kielisiteet, kulttuurienvälisyys, transnationaalisuus, kuuluminen

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited
Keskustakampuksen kirjasto

Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Representative of our age, globalization has become a reality in part through the heightened spread of "ideas, goods, information, capital and people" across the world (Held 2010: 28–29). As national borders have become more easily transcended for some, the scope of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity seems more tangible than ever. Cross-cultural encounters between people in the fields of work, study, trade, and tourism have indeed multiplied due to this relative freedom of mobility. As migration and worldwide travel have increased, foreign languages have also become more accessible. Skills in and usage of more than one language are at present the standard across the globe, further rising in value following ongoing global developments (Bhatia & Ritchie 2013: xxi). This enhanced cross-border mobility of various kinds renders multilingualism more usual and more greatly esteemed (Sobanski 2016: 161). Indeed, linguistic competences continue to gain currency due to the continuous need for cultural exchange in the areas of work and leisure.

On a global scale, transnational interactions have intensified also through the accelerated diffusion of information enabled by advancements in communication technologies. This fairly recent development has given rise to various forms of digital media, thus bringing an abundance of languages within our reach. In particular, the convenience of the internet has allowed avid language learners to pursue their linguistic aspirations with ease, as it has become more and more feasible not only to absorb oneself in foreign languages but also to interact and share experiences with like-minded people. In addition to varied learning materials, the internet provides a wide range of platforms for people to immerse themselves in different languages and cultures through music, movies, videos, podcasts, and so forth. By virtue of this online exposure to linguistic stimulation, attaining fluency in a language in adulthood has become increasingly achievable. In this spirit, polyglotism as a recreation is prone to becoming more common in the future.

In my master's thesis, I examine the identity negotiations of contemporary polyglots, namely how these avid language learners the world over construct their sense of self through linguistic pursuits and practices. Polyglots constitute a salient and timely research topic as a compelling sociocultural phenomenon in the midst of globalization, transcending linguistic and often

cultural boundaries in transnational interactions. These individuals' linguistic attachments as well as their feelings of home and belonging lie at the core of this research.

1.2 Research questions and concepts

As laid out above, this study concentrates on polyglotism as an avocation characterized by optional and zealous language learning. The focus is on the interconnections of language and identity in the experiences, emotions, values, and investments of contemporary polyglots who choose to actively acquire and develop their language skills. Firstly, I seek to investigate how these language learners from across the globe negotiate their identities through linguistic engagements. Secondly, I am concerned with the meanings polyglots assign to their first and second languages. Thirdly, I aspire to unearth how polyglots understand and relate to the notions of home and belonging in addition to drawing attention to the possible role that languages play in these perspectives. The foregoing research questions lay the groundwork for my research.

With roots in ancient Greek, the word "polyglot" signifies "many-tongued", thus referring to an individual with knowledge of several languages (Laes 2013: 11–13; Loke Wei & Chang 2016). The terms "polyglot" and "multilingual" thus differ in their etymological origins (Loke Wei & Chang). The Latin-based word is predominant in present-day English despite, it appears, only properly finding its way into the vocabulary in the nineteenth century, well after "polyglot" (ibid.). Despite the similarity of the concepts, I will use the word "polyglot", as I gathered the data for this study from polyglot-related platforms on social media. The term is appropriate, for it has additional connotations in present times. Applied linguist Aneta Pavlenko (2015) suggests that polyglots dedicate time to acquiring languages that are unnecessary for their daily lives, which sets them apart from multilinguals. I find her distinction fruitful for the purposes of this research that centers precisely on intentional and voluntary language learning sparked by passion. Indeed, polyglots opt to learn multiple languages often for the sheer pleasure of it (Jouravlev et al. 2020: 1). This phenomenon is occasionally referred to as polyglottery or polyglotism (Erard 2005; Laes 2013; Pavlenko 2015), of which I use the latter term.

The following observations are worth noting in this research. Although polyglots characteristically speak several languages, this study does not seek to spotlight the number of

languages individuals master nor their precise levels of proficiency in them. Polyglots' language expertise is thus beyond the scope of this investigation. By contrast, my emphasis is on people who purposely strive to enhance their language skills at a later age even though childhood multilinguals can be found amongst them as well. Furthermore, I apply the terms "language learning" and "language acquisition" interchangeably due to their close affinity. In research on language acquisition, foreign languages are usually taken to be learned in educational contexts and second languages in environments where they are actually spoken (Kinginger 2004: 221; Pérez Firmat 2003: 7). However, individuals' access to linguistic communities varies greatly (Kinginger 2004: 221). The data indeed reveals a broad range of language learning stories, which is why I mostly refer to polyglots' later learned, additional and target languages as second languages. I believe this term to better depict the integral role that languages play in the lives of polyglots, who engage in linguistic pursuits beyond classroom settings. In addition, I occasionally refer to first languages as mother tongues.

Languages self-evidently lie at the root of polyglot identities. Although the notion of identity can be approached in various ways within academia, it is commonly understood as one's sense of self in relation with the world. In line with sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1999: 22–23), a fragmented postmodern subject is comprised of various, often contradictory identities without a fixed, stable, and coherent core. These fractured identities are in a state of continuous transformation and produced within discourse and representation, emphasizing "becoming rather than being" (Hall 1996: 4). Acknowledged for her work on identity and language learning, Bonny Norton (2000: 125, 128) similarly views identity as "multiple, contradictory and a site of struggle" in addition to shifting across space and time. This conception drawing from feminist poststructuralism (ibid.) is fruitful in understanding how polyglots position themselves within social contexts. Following the sociolinguist David Block (2007: 27), identities can be regarded as socially fashioned narratives formed through the negotiation of novel subject positions. This is illustrative of polyglots, who construct their self-perceptions in multilingual contexts. Block (ibid.: 42) also approaches identity from different standpoints, namely nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, migration, and language. These discursive categories and more will also be present in this study, providing an intersectional outlook on polyglot practices.

Furthermore, individuals are drawn to numerous other social groups according to their attributes and interests. According to political theorist Bhikhu Parekh (2008: 15), the scope of

social categories is essentially endless, encompassing affiliations with a plethora of groups and communities. The multiplicity of these social identities entails manifold meanings, belongings and allegiances (ibid.: 24), which shows through in the various inclinations of language learners from diverse backgrounds. Polyglotism, which connects all of them in some sense, constitutes a specific pastime in the abundance of identity options at our disposal. Enthusiastic language learners thus represent a leisure pursuit transformed into a particular identity narrative overlapping with others. Chapter 2 delves into the narrative, interactional, and performative facets of polyglots' identity construction, also illuminating the prestige and privilege attached to the phenomenon.

As identity narratives are closely linked with emotions (Greco & Stenner 2008: 143), polyglots' linguistic attachments as well as detachments form a decisive part of my research. Indeed, language learning appears to be largely guided by emotions, which constitute a curiously convoluted object of study. In accordance with social anthropologist Kay Milton (2007: 73), emotion has drawn insights from essentially every field of study centered on humanity due to its pivotal role in our lives. With limited data collected in one language, there are restrictions to my research, however. Whether emotions can be considered universal or culture-specific is largely outside of the scope of this study together with whether polyglots experience emotions differently to monolinguals. I will, however, give prominence to avid language learners' attachments and detachments from their respective languages. Added to that, languages tend to play an essential part in the ways in which polyglots' relationships are fostered. The above-mentioned viewpoints will be explored in Chapter 3.

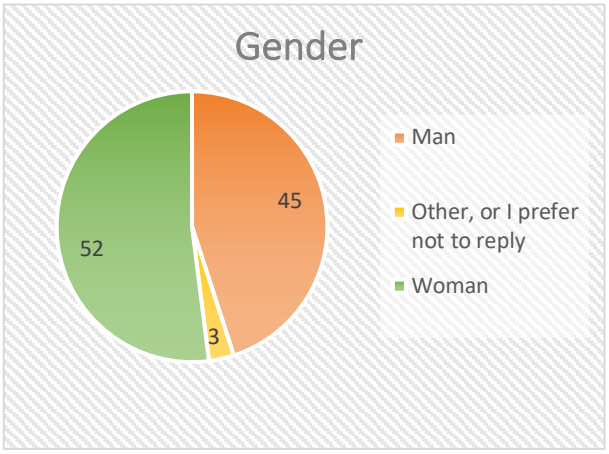
Moreover, polyglots' sentiments of home and belonging are a salient point of interest in the global era. Having conducted research in the areas of media, technologies, and cultural geography, David Morley (2000: 3) is concerned with the new ways in which the movement of people, together with electronic means of communication have permeated symbolic borders nationally as well as privately. As a result, "traditional ideas of home, homeland and nation have been destabilized" (ibid.), which provides a backdrop for polyglots' social and spatial belongings, be they more or less transnational. Chapter 4 unmasks how these language learners relate and operate in the framework of universal interconnectivity, potentially with desire and aptitudes for cultural brokering and bridge-building by virtue of their linguistic repertoires.

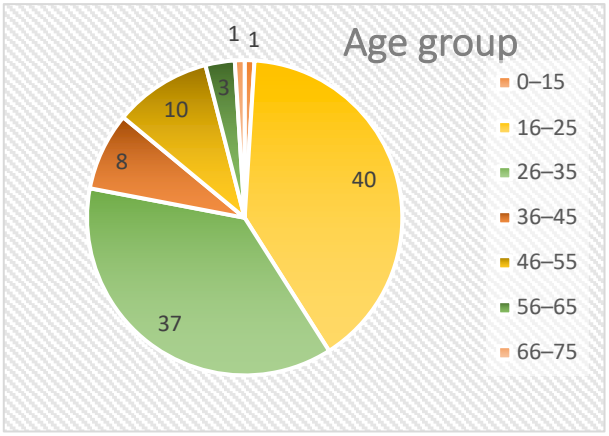
1.3 Materials and methods

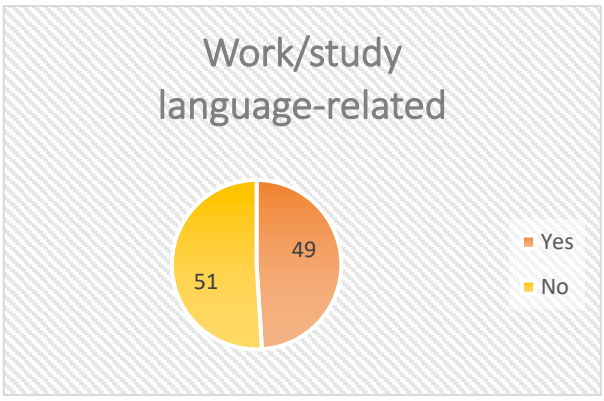
The data for this study consists of responses to two surveys posted on social media. These questionnaires were available in several groups on Facebook in January and February of 2019, attracting answers from 58 and 40 respondents, respectively. The surveys, which can be found in the appendix of this study, included sections about language acquisition and usage, identity, belonging, self-image, and values. Compared to the initial survey, the second version contained more precise questions, especially regarding the participants' views on home and belonging. Throughout this research, I treat the two questionnaires as part of the same entity due to their similarity, thus referring to them in the singular form. When the informants are cited at length, however, their respective surveys are marked in the form of S1 or S2. The survey included multiple choice questions where respondents were asked to select from several options ranging from "Very important" to "Not important at all". However, the main emphasis was on open-ended questions aimed at deeper self-reflection, which would hopefully lead to more usable data for the purposes of qualitative research. This study indeed relies heavily on the informants' own words, whose contribution provided a compelling data set to interpret. I have kept the participants' long citations in their original form, including possible spelling mistakes.

Through social media, I was able to reach people from across the globe. In order to maximize the number of responses, the survey was posted on several Facebook groups focusing on polyglots, namely Polyglots; Polyglots (The Community); Polyglots Europe; Polyglots Unleashed; Polyglots, Polyglots, Polyglots!!!; Polyglots (The Community - Free Zone) as well as Polyglot Conversations and Off-Topic. The choice of channel is well-founded, for social media provides an open platform for avid language learners to follow language-related topics as well as to interact with each other. The first two groups are, in particular, lively discussion forums each with over 30, 000 members supposedly from all over the world. These online communities were thus fruitful in providing a multifaceted focus group for my research. Even though not all of the respondents identify as polyglots, in the context of this study, I mostly refer to them as such as a whole. This is justified because the informants were found through Facebook groups centered on this phenomenon, thus aware of the term's connotations. In some cases, however, the survey was shared with people outside of these groups who were interested in languages.

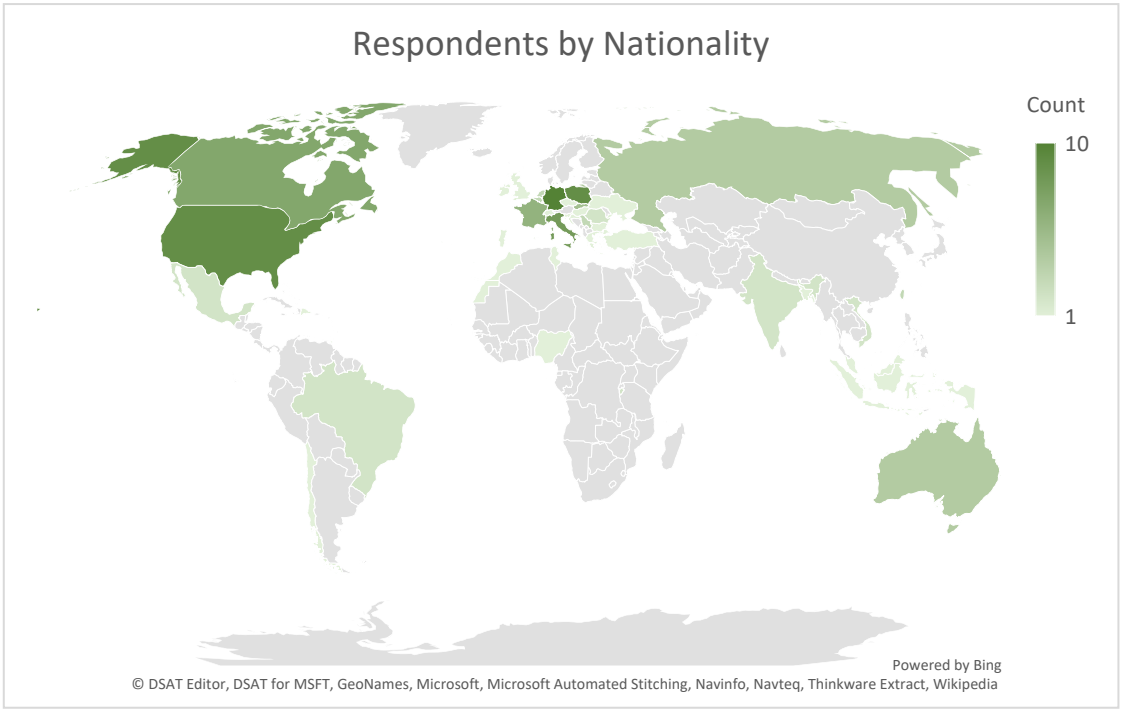
Consisting of the combined surveys, the diagrams below show the respondents' distribution by gender, approximate age and possible language-related work or study. As demonstrated, the distribution by gender is nearly even, as women make up 52 percent and men 45 percent of the focus group, while 3 percent either did not wish to enclose their gender or identified as other. When referring to the latter group, I avoid the use of personal pronouns. The second pie chart below illustrates that the vast majority of the informants are people under the age of 36, 41 percent of them even under the age of 26. This can be partly explained by young people's eagerness to be active on social media, although it has to be said that Facebook has lost some of its popularity amongst young people. Furthermore, almost half of the respondents report either studying or working in a language-related field.





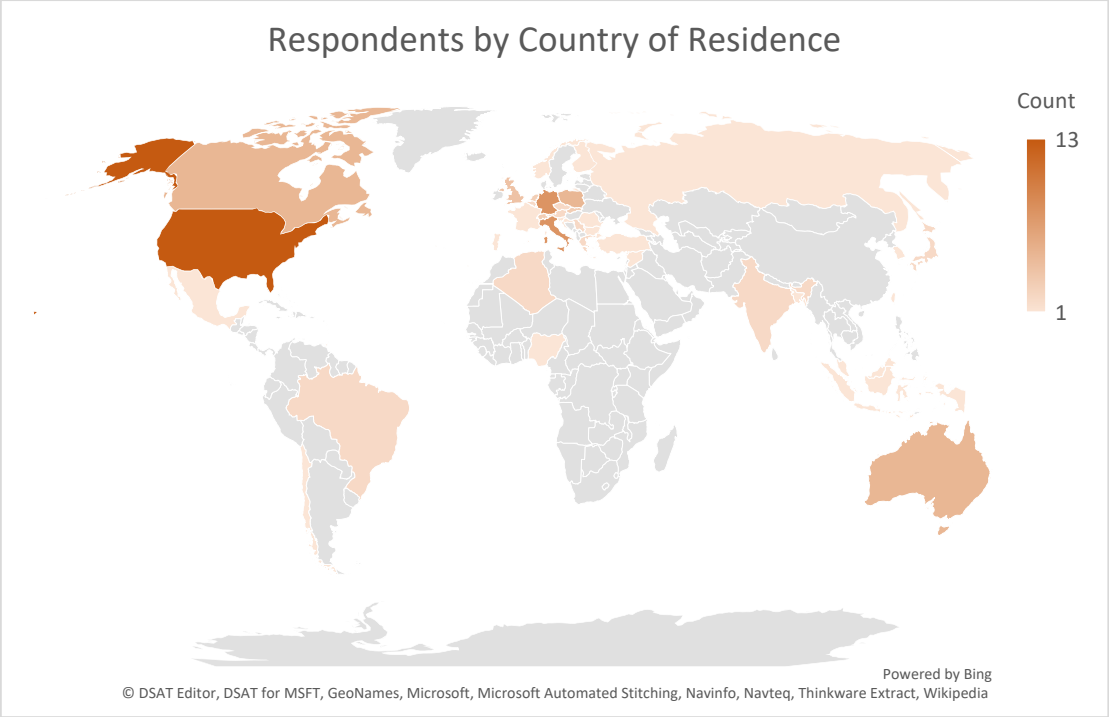


The variety of the focus group shines through in the following map chart elucidating the informants' nationalities. As shown, they point to six continents including Europe, North America, South America, Asia, Africa, and Australia, which also reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of the responses. The participants represent 50 different nationalities, including double and triple citizenships. In particular, there is a significant proportion of Germans, Poles, Americans, Canadians and Italians amongst the respondents.



If the respondents' nationalities are diverse, so are their places of residence. The chart below shows how the informants are situated on the map. Their countries of residence include 42 different countries, the United States, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Australia being the most

popular. It can thus be concluded that the vast majority of the informants have a link to the Western world, typically Europe or North America.



When conducting a study involving informants more or less active in the same Facebook groups and possibly familiar to each other through polyglot events, ethical questions need to be taken into consideration. I did not ask the respondents for their real names in the survey, and in order to protect their anonymity, I refer to them by their self-chosen pseudonyms. If an informant did not suggest a pseudonym, I assigned them one. In cases where a participant allowed me to use their actual name, I typically only use their first name for the sake of conciseness.

In terms of methodology, thematic content analysis is a useful tool in decoding the survey responses of 98 informants. This method of qualitative data analysis consists of breaking down the data in search for patterns**,** thus enhancing my understanding of the similarities and differences in polyglot tendencies worldwide. Indeed, thematic categorization enables me to not only identify recurring but also absent themes in the informants' language-related views, values, and experiences. My interpretation of this cultural phenomenon is also facilitated by the classification of comparable elements into wider themes such as identity, self-image,

linguistic ties, relationships, home, belonging, and globalization. These core concepts lie at the heart of this study, whose structure loosely follows those of the two questionnaires.

In order to gain deeper insight into this avocation, I seek to link polyglot experiences to broader social and cultural frameworks. Characteristic of area and cultural studies, contextualization allows me to interpret the different meanings embedded in polyglots' identity negotiations. In other words, I am able to delve into the worldviews, ideologies, and social conditions that underpin and inform avid language learners' understandings of the world. Suitable for interpreting cultural practices, cultural analysis provides a versatile outlook on this global phenomenon, prompting me to investigate polyglot narratives through an interdisciplinary lens. I indeed draw from various fields of study such as cultural studies, anthropology, linguistics, and sociology when examining avid language learning. The above-mentioned approaches complement each other as I aspire to answer my research questions.

1.4 Earlier research

As stated by linguist Li Wei (2013: 26), there has been a wealth of cross-disciplinary investigation into bilingualism and multilingualism, which characterize the "coexistence, contact, and interaction of different languages" with individual as well as societal dimensions. Particularly since the 1970s, research on this topic has developed into a notable area of academic study, drawing different and occasionally conflicting standpoints from a variety of fields such as psychology, linguistics, and sociology. Language can indeed be viewed as a cognitive ability, structural system or a social phenomenon, in the latter case a communicative practice linked with social identity construction within wider political and historical frameworks. (Ibid.: 35, 41, 43.) My research leans upon this sociolinguistic perspective, which allows for a fruitful examination of linguistic pursuits as interactional practices.

The notion of identity has been broadly explored across behavioral sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Within cultural studies, in particular, Stuart Hall's work has had a major impact on discussions of cultural identity. Furthermore, increasing cross-disciplinary attention has been drawn to the ways in which identities are shaped, established, and negotiated, a novel emphasis to some extent prompted by heightened interactions between diverse groups as a result of social developments including movement of people (De Fina 2006: 351). Such transnational processes also undergird my approach to polyglots' identity work.

Moreover, multiple disciplines including anthropology, sociology, and linguistics have seen an unparalleled surge of interest in identity and language, the latter now widely recognized as a key component of identity construction (Bamberg et al. 2006: 1). The interlinkages of identity and language learning have been acknowledged in the fields of second language acquisition and second language education (Rahimian 2015: 305–306), also sparking the interest of scholars such as Adrian Blackledge, David Block, Charlotte Burck, Bonny Norton, Aneta Pavlenko, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, whose contributions are referred to in this study. Pavlenko (2005: 35) claims that the fields of bilingualism and second language acquisition continue to overlook emotions. Her research on the interconnections of emotions and languages has significantly informed my analysis of polyglots' linguistic attachments.

Research on identity in the framework of language acquisition has mostly called for qualitative methods, leaning on "critical ethnography, feminist poststructuralist theory, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology" (Norton 2012: 13). A poststructuralist perspective on identity has become prominent not only in social sciences, but also in applied linguistics (Block 2007: 12–13, 27). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) indeed draw on poststructuralist views in their analysis of identity negotiations in multilingual settings, theoretical stances that have guided my thinking to a large extent. As mentioned, this study draws major insights from sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, intersecting disciplines concerned with the issues of identity as well as linguistic belief systems (Wardhaugh & Fuller 2014: 15). Ideologies embedded in polyglots' language attitudes in specific contexts are thus relevant to my research. The relationship between language and power has been highlighted by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu ([1982] 2001), whose work also sheds light on polyglots' linguistic exchanges.

While multilingual identities have generated interest within academia, particular polyglot practices merit more attention. Michael Erard (2012) has drawn attention to this phenomenon by exploring hyperpolyglots' exceptional linguistic abilities in his traveloguelike survey. Brenna Sobanski (2016), in turn, has conducted a research on a polyglot identity in the case of multilinguals cultivating a connection with the world through languages. I have adopted a similar approach with an emphasis on polyglots' cultural negotiations, linguistic bonds, and social belongings rather than their aptitudes as language learners. This sociocultural phenomenon propelled by transnational flows is certainly worthy of inquiry from the aforementioned vantage points.

2 Polyglots' identity negotiations

2.1 Identity and self-image

As laid out in the introduction, a poststructuralist understanding of identity centers on a social, self-aware, and continuous narrative a person "performs, interprets and projects" through various acts including language use (Block 2006: 38). This chapter examines polyglot identities precisely as relational, narrative, and performative with a particular focus on self-confidence and talent in the respondents' self-perceptions. I will begin with a short analysis of the role of language in identity negotiations and end by illuminating multiplicity and hybridity characteristic of contemporary polyglots in transnational interactions as well as by addressing relations of power within particular sociocultural contexts. Ideological processes indeed underpin the formation of polyglot selves, which are shaped in multilingual and often multicultural settings through exposure and response to linguistic stimulations.

Our sense of self is constructed in connection with the world, which we seek to understand and interpret through language. Linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure (1916: 102, 107) views language as a socially and historically shaped system of arbitrary signs. Furthermore, Hall (2003: 87–88) characterizes language as a sign system whereby we assign meanings to the world. Benjamin Bailey (2007: 341), who has researched language and social identities, similarly describes language as humans' principal semiotic instrument for "representing and negotiating social reality". The symbolic dimensions integral to all human activity are also acknowledged by cultural studies scholar Mikko Lehtonen (2014: 302). In light of the foregoing, languages as symbolic systems become increasingly interesting in multilingual contexts. As words carry meanings, people well versed in multiple languages can draw from a large repertoire of linguistic resources. Not only do multilinguals have a wider array of linguistic varieties for identity negotiation than monolingual and monocultural people, they also tend to be acquainted with comparatively varied cultural contexts for explaining and assessing reality (Bailey 2007: 342).

With a background in psychotherapy, Charlotte Burck (2005: 32) points to studies suggesting that multilinguals in encouraging environments have better mental flexibility and more communicative resources at their disposal than people who only speak one language. Individuals can benefit from this resilience and adjustability generated by multiple languages

and viewpoints (ibid.: 187). Furthermore, the ability to switch from one language to another either in one's mind or in social interactions is reflective of this elasticity and creativity. In my material, this tendency is illustrated by *Pimenthée*, a respondent of French, Italian and Belgian nationality, whose "brain functions in various languages on a daily basis", which demonstrates not only her linguistic versatility but also the comprehensive presence of languages in her daily life.

As pointed out, polyglot identities can be regarded as deeply socially produced. Sociologist Steph Lawler (2008: 7–8) indeed emphasizes interdependence between people, treating identities as socially constructed and thus shaped between as opposed to within individuals. In this vein, polyglot selves are fashioned in social relationships through linguistic practices that they engage in. Numerous informants indeed give prominence to social interactions with people from different cultures, especially native speakers of their target languages. While American *Anna* views languages as simply a tool to connect with friends, French *Cécile*'s language learning is motivated by her need to communicate with people as a strong extrovert. Although multiple informants also value languages first and foremost for their linguistic peculiarities, fascination with systems and structures is not devoid of social dimensions either. Even written texts are still intended to be read, which underlines the social nature of all linguistic activity. Acquiring or using a language is thus never a purely solitary endeavor.

Furthermore, the responses disclose a wide range of personal language learning stories from childhood to adulthood. Individuals' experiences become sensible and consistent in the narratives that they tell, stories essential to social interactions as well as identity formation (Benwell & Stokoe 2006: 42, 130). Narratives indeed provide people means to actively and constantly construct and rewrite their sense of self also through language usage (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 19, 23). Through these language-oriented autobiographies, polyglots seek to make sense of themselves as they navigate their multilingual lives. Indonesian *Menma*, who grew up speaking Javanese and Indonesian and studies Japanese literature, shines a light on her self-narrative:

> The languages I speak now are part of my identity. I never thought they would affect my self-image and my future when I was younger, but they did. Speaking these languages makes me confident too. (Menma, S1.)

As a part-time freelance translator and writer, *Menma* now views languages as an essential part of her life and a source of self-confidence. Thus, she has reformulated and revamped her

linguistic identity narrative over time. Narratives indeed involve transition "from past to present", "from present to future" and "from what could be to what is" (Lawler 2008: 19), temporal aspects reflecting language learning as an imaginative process, possibly an investment in future. Inspired by philosopher Paul Ricoeur's work, Lawler (ibid.: 11) also brings forth the salience of characters, action and plot for narratives, which encompass events and episodes connected to each other in a coherent and ordered manner. The responses include numerous references to languages studied in school, countries lived in, as well as overall experiences in multilingual company. Polyglot trajectories thus come across as a series of language-related events and undertakings, often presented in chronological order. Polish *Jowita* is conscious of the course her life has taken by virtue of her extensive linguistic repertoire, her "only significant professional skill". She narrates her life choices as follows:

> I grew up in Poland, and I've lived/ studied/worked in Spain, Morocco, Belgium, Austria, Egypt, Malta, Greece, Serbia and Syria since. I always try to learn the local language. (Jowita, S1.)

Her multiple relocations give an impression of a highly transnational identity narrative thriving upon engagement in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural practices. Not only do identity narratives give meaning to people's experiences, they also highlight individuals' agency in pursuing their passions and goals. In fact, Mexican *Kaixa* persevered to learn Japanese in six months and found a job as a result of his hard work and competitiveness, now convinced of people's potential to learn a language also beyond childhood. Italian *Shotby*, in contrast, characterizes his second languages as the "results of years of efforts, trials and errors", which illustrates how a linguistic odyssey can be portrayed through obstacles as well as triumphs. The aforementioned informants express attitudes, experiences, and occasions noteworthy on their subjective language learning journeys. By interpreting their past, individuals valorize particular events in the formation of their life stories (ibid.: 16). Progress made in languages as well as cross-cultural experiences at home and abroad are embedded in polyglot trajectories.

As shown, adult language acquisition and especially the attainment of proficiency constitute a transformation, a success story in the polyglot narrative. Language skills acquired through systematic work can indeed be considered a sign of diligence and persistence, and several respondents including French *Cécile* and Polish *Zuz* do take pride in their linguistic achievements, the latter emphasizing the efforts required to achieve a broad linguistic repertoire. This sense of pride is woven into their narratives of the self. The narratives that people tell themselves and others shape their identities, interpretation playing an integral role

in individuals' perceptions of their lives (ibid.: 29–30). Polyglots' life trajectories indeed encompass their interpretations of themselves as language learners particularly with respect to self-confidence and talent, which become especially pertinent in social interactions, thus in comparison with others.

Numerous informants indeed refer to their (enhanced) self-confidence that stemmed from their language skills, approaching the topic from various perspectives. While German *André M.* is known as "the guy who knows so many languages", Turkish *Destina* is someone many people turn to when in need of help with foreign languages, both cases demonstrating the significance of recognition from others to one's self-image. Furthermore, Canadian *DTEssence* alludes to the benefits of talking to people regardless of making mistakes and *Larka* brings up her improved self-discipline in learning new things. Another Italian, *Will P.*, whom languages have helped with feelings of shyness and embarrassment, compares language learning to going to the gym for "mental and social skills". Linguistic competences can thus help people in overcoming their insecurities.

Native fluency in more than one language can also be empowering for one's sense of self. As a native speaker of Italian and German, *Ally* indeed views languages as her "only talent" while *Nose* of French and Irish nationality considers them "by far what I do best", which also adduces the positive impact that childhood multilingualism can have on one's self-image. Nevertheless, *Nose* claims his self-esteem to depend heavily upon how he is doing in his languages, mother tongues included. Self-critical and perfectionist tendencies are also expressed by American *Anna*, who occasionally fears that people around her realize that she is not as good at languages as they believe. This fear of being exposed alludes to an impostor syndrome, a tendency to question one's abilities and achievements.

While the idea of possessing a particular talent does not resonate with all of the respondents, many of them do see themselves as gifted at least in some areas. Willingness to characterize oneself as talented is often corroborated by other people's comments, as illustrated by Serbian *Ela* whom many believe to have that "something" for languages. Self-narratives indeed need to correspond to other people's narratives to some extent, which underscores the sociality of identities (ibid.). Furthermore, *Jowita* refers to her ability to learn languages "much faster than most people" and to being "completely fluent in just a few months" "with comparatively little effort", which highlights the salience of comparison when evaluating one's language skills.

Also, Polish *Kabel* feels "predisposed" to learning languages while still recognizing the relevance of systematic work in acquiring linguistic competences.

When acknowledging their talent, the informants occasionally specify their strongest areas such as grammar or pronunciation. *Shotby* claims to be good at grammar, whereas French *Trezoq*, Czech *Fancy Poncho* and American *Andrew* disclose a sensitive ear for accents. While the latter has a "good ear for accent and tone" presumably due to his musicality, he considers himself a "terrible language-learner, subpar in every way". Talent in one area thus does not guarantee competence in others. In fact, several informants also consider themselves average language learners, occasionally mentioning their limited memory when acquiring new vocabulary. As an illustration, American *Kiki* denies having a "particular talent for pronunciation or memorization". It is worth noting, however, that the question of talent may elicit modest, self-critical and thus dismissive assessments of one's abilities in the respondents. Overall, this reluctance to characterize oneself as talented may stem from not only self-criticism but also cultural norms regarding how acceptable it is to compliment oneself.

While the issue of talent divides views amongst the respondents, they regularly emphasize that language acquisition is universally achievable. In fact, it seems to be a common belief amongst polyglots that anyone could learn numerous languages if they are willing to put time and effort into the process. The informants indeed often apply notions such as engagement, dedication, and motivation when characterizing themselves as language learners. While German *Batman* claims language learning to be 30 percent talent and 70 percent engagement, *André M.* believes in dedication and American *Mr. Montgomery* in "passion and motivation".

According to Norton (2013: 50–51), the notion of motivation is inadequate in addressing the intricacies of second language acquisition. With links to social psychology and quantitative methods, instrumental motivation assumes a "unitary, fixed, and ahistorical" individual propelled by utilitarian goals. Instead, she proposes the concept of investment that is better suited to the complexities of language learning and further identity construction. When investing in a particular language, individuals with diverse desires and entangled backgrounds also invest in their continuously shifting identities. More than mere competence attained through committed study, second language learning constitutes a "complex social practice" involving a balance of power. (Ibid.: 168.)

While Norton's research centers on immigration contexts imbued with power dynamics particularly, this more comprehensive concept of investment is of value also in the context of voluntary and vehement language learning. Compared to reductive motivation and hard work, the idea of investing in several languages more accurately seizes the intensity, and thus seriousness, of many of the respondents' linguistic pursuits and through this the extent to which they fashion their lives through them. This drive is especially illustrative of informants immersed in transnational interactions. Additionally, the notion of investment not only accentuates polyglots' agency and time spent on their avocation, but also engages their multiple identities, whose intersections I will elaborate on shortly.

Polyglot identities can also be examined from the perspective of performativity germane to daily life. Drawing on sociologist Erwin Goffman, Lawler (2008: 107) notes that identities are always performances, for "all social life is artificial". Performativity entails both "being" and "becoming" when presenting matters through repetitive as well as deviant actions (Lehtonen 2014: 322–324). Following historian Greg Dening (2002: 5–6), humans can be thought of as storytellers who ponder, read, write, travel, and communicate without ever attaining completeness. These performative acts certainly interweave with the usual demeanor of polyglots, who can still never reach flawless proficiency in their target languages. A performance of any kind is perpetually directed at someone, "an audience, a reader, self" (ibid.). When learning languages, polyglots often expect reactions from other people, friends, or native speakers of their target languages, thus assessing their progress or achievements in relation to others.

With this in mind, the informants typically perform the activities of a devoted linguaphile, more or less consciously shaping their identities through consistent language learning and maintenance. By way of illustration, *Kabel* reads articles, watches films, and converses with people in his target languages while also relying on mobile applications, dictionaries, and exercise books when practicing the ones he is a beginner in. Performativity is indeed present in the ordinary acts of studying grammar, reading books, using applications and dictionaries, following the media, interacting with native speakers, seeking out an online community of polyglots as well as exchanging language learning tips with them. German *NorthernLass*, for instance, is looking for multilingual content and information about learning resources in a polyglot group on Facebook. What is more, some may regularly attend polyglot-related events around the world. The above-mentioned practices and more constitute recurring actions that

shape polyglot identities. The notion of performativity thus ties in with language learning as a pastime based on consistency.

By engaging in activities in their target languages, the respondents may not only adopt but earn the label of polyglot from others, which illustrates the actual consequences of performatives. Although many of the informants do not self-identify as polyglots despite their proficiency and passion for languages, the pattern of repetitive behavior is still salient. Performatives produce and reiterate reality rather than present it, encompassing physical and communicative practices as well as emotional expressions (Lehtonen 2014: 328). These mundane actions demonstrate the banality of everyday performativity in polyglots' narratives, who memorize vocabulary, expose themselves to foreign media, and engage in interactions in their target languages.

Beneath these language learning pursuits, polyglots' multiple subjectivities merit consideration. In contrast to past research on language and identity, it is now essential to acknowledge the plurality of identities as opposed to focusing on a single subject position (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 16). In poststructuralist thought, numerous identity categories including gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, and social status overlap and thus influence each other (ibid.). The recognition of these overlapping social categories is also germane to feminist and more specifically intersectional theory, a concept coined and developed by critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw ([1989] 1998: 314–315). An intersectional perspective is indeed helpful in understanding the manifold identity narratives that come across in the informants' responses, as polyglots naturally represent and pertain to various subject positions.

Identity formation occurs at the intersection of "structure and agency", as one is both influenced by and influences their social narrative (Block 2006: 38–39). While I have hitherto given prominence to the role of individual agency in linguistic endeavors and practices, societal power structures can also constrain people's identity alternatives. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: 19–20) view identities as pertinent and noticeable precisely when they come into conflict, distinguishing continuous identity production and performance from repositioning in circumstances where individuals defy identities assigned to them by others as well as opt to adopt new ones. As intercultural communication scholar Stella Ting-Toomey (1999: 40) argues, people seek to "assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others' desired self-images" through identity negotiations. Relations of power thus undergird the ways

in which polyglots challenge as well as take on fresh subject positions. American *Anna* alludes to such identity struggles when describing other people's reactions to her:

> I feel connected to many different places and cultures. When people know I am not a monolingual, they tend to assume I am not from the USA. A Deaf man once asked my ethnicity. When I told him, "white", he replied, "No, you are not white." I have also been told I have a foreign accent multiple times when I am speaking English. Strangers will ask me where I am from or make assumptions about where they think I am from. Two days ago I was told, "Wow! You even hug Spanish!" I have been called mulatto, but I have also been asked if I was Chinese, Jewish, Middle Eastern, European, Hispanic, or Native American. People from Columbia have told me I need to work on my Spanish, because my accent makes it sound like I am from Mexico. I feel deeply connected to both the Northern and Southern USA… (Anna, S2.)

Anna's account illustrates the relevance of others' perceptions and attitudes for ones' sense of self, which further underlines identity construction as a social, relational and interactional process. Racial aspects are particularly pronounced in her response as well, which demonstrates not only the overlapping nature of identity categories but also the prominence of racialized identities in the Unites States, a nation known to be a mélange of different ethnicities, cultures, and languages. As linguist and language educator Timothy Reagan (2009: 73, 132) points out, Spanish speakers make up the country's biggest linguistic minority, albeit marginalized. The normalization of monolingualism in favor of English renders the knowledge and use of several languages unusual and to some extent unnatural in the American context. Moreover, multilingualism is often conflated with lower social class and thus deemed questionable. (Ibid.: 70–73.) As sociolinguist Allan Bell (2014: 4) notes, language ties in with "social meanings" and further belief systems, as the afore-described attitudes show. In accordance with linguistic anthropologist Kathryn Woolard (1998: 3–4), language ideologies indeed go beyond language, adhering to wider social and cultural structures. In light of the above, *Anna's* ease with Spanish and her multilingualism in general defy the nation's monolingual norms, also breaking assumptions about dominant-language speakers. Her linguistic as well as ethnic identities thus exhibit ambiguity.

While individuals and groups are unable to dispute "imposed" and thus non-negotiable identities in specific spatio-temporal contexts and generally unwilling to challenge "assumed identities", which tend to be the most appreciated and validated in society, "negotiable identities" are challenged for various reasons (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 21). *Anna* appears to be particularly acquainted with other people's assumptions regarding her ethnicity, namely people attempting to position her in ways unfamiliar or incorrect to her. In our efforts to

comprehend cultures, cultural identity is wrongly yet generally understood as tied to a particular place, environment, or landscape (Hall 2003: 92–93), which can partly explain other people's keenness towards *Anna's* origins on the basis of her appearance or pronunciation. In a strict sense, ethnicity as a form of cultural identity is associated with shared blood ties, origin, history as well as dwelling place (ibid.), a challenging view in the context of a multicultural United States in addition to being unhelpful for her identity construction. *Anna* further depicts her chameleon-like tendencies when navigating different linguistic and cultural landscapes:

> I sometimes feel like I am always changing how I act depending on who I am with. I can get overwhelmed when I think about this too much. I want to always blend in, but I have embraced things from multiple cultures. No matter where I am I can usually appear to blend in on the surface, but underneath I don't feel I really fit anywhere. (Anna, S2.)

Claiming to belong with people who are multilingual, she seems to absorb influences from a variety of languages, places, and cultures, thus exhibiting hybrid tendencies. The multitude and fragmentation of people's changing positions in different settings engender novel and hybrid identity alternatives (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 16–17). Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1994: 37–38) approaches hybridity from the perspective of "third space". In the words of applied linguist Meredith Doran (2004: 96), this concept constitutes an "in-between or liminal space of culture" that allows mixed identities to be fashioned apart from the dominant society. *Anna's* portrayal reflects the complexities of hybrid cultural identities and the struggle to mediate one's place in the world. Despite her partial alienation, she also alludes to creative ways of handling her ambivalences, shifting her behavior depending on the company she is in. More broadly, cultural hybridity can be regarded as a powerful source of creativity giving rise to new forms of identity emblematic of late modernity (Hall 1999: 72).

Cultural identities can thus be elusive and shifting, drawing influences from numerous languages, traditions, and histories. These hybrid characteristics have become particularly apparent as a result of globalization. (Ibid.: 71.) This shows particularly clearly in the case of *Benedict,* who has resided in Trinidad and Tobago his whole life. Having grown up speaking Trinidadian English Creole at home and in public, he also has Canadian citizenship with native fluency in English, a degree in Hispanic literature as well as familial connections to China and the Cantonese language. In addition, he expresses his interest in Norwegian and Swedish due to having friends from those Scandinavian countries. These transnational flows paint a picture of multifaceted identity narrative exposed and open to linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Furthermore, *Benedict* considers Trinidadian English Creole a "unique language", hence a part

of him. He clearly does not subscribe to any pejorative or belittling attitudes towards creoles and pidgins generally described as "savage, corrupt, and bastardized forms of colonial languages" (Macedo et al. 2003: 34). Frequently rooted in European colonial rule, the emergence of these mixed languages constitutes a cultural process in itself (Jourdan 2006: 135). The example shows that social and historical processes are also reflected in linguistic hybridization, which is embedded in this respondent's daily language of communication. Linguistic and polyglot identities are further shaped by global flows.

As shown, polyglots can also embrace their various subjectivities in positive and imaginative ways. Burck (2005: 186–187), who has studied the identity constructions of multilinguals' living in Britain, describes how her research participants occasionally took pleasure in "playing with their multiplicities" and appearing vague to others who had trouble characterizing and locating them. In a similar spirit, the respondents of this study exhibit hybridity as a useful and joyful resource. *A nationality confused German*, who is also married to a Ukrainian, provides an example of this pleasant ambiguity:

> I feel like I am nationally confused. I am from Germany, live in America, speak Russian, want to live in Serbia. How does that even make sense?? But it feels great to confuse people! (A nationality confused German, S2.)

Despite his disorientation, *A nationality confused German* seems to enjoy the mysterious impression he more or less intentionally conveys to others though his linguistically and culturally diverse self-narrative. This informant appears to celebrate his multiple subjectivities, cherishing fluidity in his life choices. Multilingual people can indeed view themselves as manifold with wide identifications and belongings (Burck 2005: 90). The findings of this study do largely suggest that modern-day polyglots construct multifarious, shifting, and hybrid identities in response to global flows, as will be enlarged on in Chapter 4. So far, I have sought to provide a multifaceted outlook on polyglot identities in light of their deep-seated sociality, narrativity, and performativity. I will now proceed to examine this avocation as a phenomenon imbued with social meanings, demystifying the convoluted notion of polyglot.

2.2 Prestige and privilege?

People can be drawn to numerous artificial, partial, and temporary communities **(**Hall 1999: 13), including polyglotism as one specific identity option among many. As identities are shaped through difference (ibid.), linguistic interests and ambitions set avid language learners apart

from others. This chapter delves into this distinction from the perspectives of prestige and privilege, both through the label of polyglot and the advantages that avid language learners are likely to possess. With an emphasis on symbolic and cultural capital, I will shed light on the connotations attached to this in some sense trendy and elitist pastime, further elucidating how particular polyglot identities are cultivated. Often, the adoption of the title of polyglot contributes to a more reputable and desirable identity narrative.

Who counts as a polyglot is a multifaceted topic drawing wide-ranging definitions from the respondents of my study. Most of them identify as polyglots; this being expected, as the survey was posted on Facebook groups focused on the avocation. What is more, roughly 41 percent of the informants exclusively or additionally feel an affinity with the notion of multilingual. To Turkish *Destina*, a polyglot, in contrast to a mere multilingual, not only speaks several languages but also loves them. German *Porko* further attaches importance to "fascination and geekiness" rather than necessity. While most people's bilingualism in the world can be explained by a necessity to survive in a given society (see Skutnabb-Kangas 1986: 44), polyglots certainly make up a privileged exception with their ardent and voluntary linguistic aspirations.

In Sobanski's (2016: 166) research on a polyglot identity, individuals engaged in language learning out of love for the process and interest in languages for themselves. In a similar vein, the respondents of this thesis tend to understand polyglotism through dedication, enthusiasm and, above all, love for languages. While *Pimenthée* from Brussels values passion over quantity, Australian *Lou* highlights the optional and intentional aspect of the recreation as opposed to language skills acquired in childhood. According to Italian *Shotby*, a polyglot "has no intention to stop learning and practicing his linguistic skills", which further underlines the continuousness of their language engagements. Bangladeshi *Rakesh Ratul* also emphasizes the ability to comfortably switch between languages in daily life, whereas *Nose* adduces knowledge of "world language facts", thus thirst for information and an awareness of the world.

Furthermore, the informants' definitions of polyglotism differ greatly regarding the quantity of languages learned and used. According to German *André M.*, "a polyglot is someone who speaks multiple languages, at least two. The more they speak, the more the term fits them". French-German *Amids* also believes in "many languages", uninterested in the exact number. Meanwhile, Russian-Canadian *Iouri* refers to at least seven languages and Slovak *Veron* to

more than ten. The total of languages spoken fluently indeed seems to be of interest to several informants as a defining factor in whether or not they qualify as polyglots. Also, Slovak *Any* believes to be on her way to becoming a polyglot, hoping to be fluent in at least seven languages before she dies. Somewhat similarly, American *Mr. Montgomery* wishes to be "able to speak conversationally in at least 20 languages by the time I'm 50 years old". This emphasis on quantity not only suggests an appreciation for something measurable but also points to a love of challenges and a competitive spirit, which can also attract praise and bring about social approval.

Although the adoption of the label of polyglot may reflect a simple desire to associate oneself with like-minded people, it arguably carries prestigious connotations, which can be examined from the perspective of capital present throughout this chapter. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986: 243) famously distinguishes different types of capital in his analysis of the social world. While economic capital refers to money and property, social capital consists of social networks. Cultural capital in its institutionalized state involves academic qualifications, whereas its objectified form indicates physical items that people own and use. (Ibid.: 243, 246–247.) It is appropriate and fruitful to examine polyglots as individuals more or less in possession of cultural capital, particularly in its embodied state. This third form encompasses "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body", thus the acquisition of cultural knowledge through investments of time for the purpose of self-betterment (ibid.: 243–244). Dedicated and time-intensive language learning followed by attainment of proficiency can indeed be viewed as a dimension of personal enrichment. More concretely, language skills are embodied resources that polyglots carry with them and often make use of in social interactions.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1979) claims that cultural capital creates divisions between classes through the consumption of cultural products, as the power elite seeks to distance itself from the lower classes through refined taste with respect to spending. Although polyglots come across as modern intellectuals with specific interests, they devote their free time to instructive pursuits as opposed to merely succumbing to the distractions of consumerist mass culture. In fact, the constructive and goal-oriented pattern of "consuming" languages can at present be considered a respectable alternative to the lavish consumption of goods. Adding to that, polyglots can be viewed as language gatherers, whose linguistic assets become their embodied cultural capital.

Polyglot practices differentiate zealous language learners from people disinterested in broadening their linguistic horizons. Indeed, subscribing to the label of polyglot suggests a desire to join the linguistic elite by distinguishing oneself from monolingual or otherwise "normal" people. Polyglotism thus constitutes a distinction attained through linguistic investments, a notion born out of comparison. Concepts and thus groups are indeed founded on divisions (Bourdieu 1979: 559). More specifically, polyglots' linguistic aspirations and practices can be thought to stem from preferences, that is to say taste. According to Bourdieu, taste lies at the core of lifestyle, a uniform group of particular inclinations. Lifestyles can be thought of as sign systems produced by the habitus, which refers to people's unconscious and involuntary manners of being. (Ibid.: 190–192, 193, 543.) In this respect, polyglots' modes of living can certainly be considered unusual and distinctive, colored by a particular passion.

The peculiarities of polyglot lifestyles can become more recognizable through other people's reactions. In fact, American *Kiki* was initially identified as a polyglot by others, surprised to consider it an identity rather than a mere activity. *Mr. Montgomery*, in turn, enjoys receiving attention from people who are impressed by his language skills. Furthermore, Australian *The Bee guy* and Chilean *BG* mention feeling "intelligent" and "smarter" by virtue of their language skills, respectively. The former attributes this to the lack of appreciation for multilingualism in his home country and the latter to the scarcity of people able to speak a foreign tongue presumably in his living environment. All of these examples demonstrate the distinguishing function of linguistic pursuits and competences.

Interested in polyglots' brains from a cognitive and neurological viewpoint, Olessia Jouravlev, Zachary Mineroff and Idan Blank (2020: 1) point out how adults tend to struggle with learning a foreign tongue while polyglots opt to learn many of them, often just for the sheer pleasure of it. This raises questions about their possibly extraordinary minds (ibid.). Having researched ancient polyglots, historian Christian Laes (2013: 24) adduces how present-day polyglots are said to able to quickly examine a language, imitate non-native sounds, benefit from an enormous memory as well as smoothly alternate between languages, skills frequently regarded as extraordinary. In the words of American *Andrew*, however, " 'high capacity' is an arbitrary phrase and fluency more-or-less a myth", which calls the above-mentioned exceptional qualities into question. Although the respondents tend to lay emphasis on passion rather than talent, the title of polyglot carries particular prestige, which shines through in the ability to impress others with one's linguistic repertoire. Although Australian *Lou* does not ascribe to the

notion of polyglot, she adduces a "certain respect" gained from others by virtue of her language skills. Taiwanese *Chang*, in turn, is seen as "unique" and a "born polyglot" by some due to his linguistic competences, which highlights the symbolic power embedded in the term. Symbolic capital refers to recognition obtained from others, sometimes in an institutionalized form (Bourdieu [1982] 2001: 107). Drawing on Bourdieu, sociologist Bridget Fowler (1991: 31) describes symbolic capital as "reputation or honour" along with intellectual integrity. The most estimable and arguably elitist title in the polyglot world seems to be that of hyperpolyglot, of which Polish *GKJ* provides the following description:

> Hyperpolyglot is a person USING (speaking, writing, understanding) minimum 6 languages fluently (minimum B2 level as defined in CEFR - certified). Started since becoming a member of HYPIA (International Organisation of Hyperpolyglots). (GKJ, S1.)

He began identifying as a hyperpolyglot through affiliation with this exclusive organization valorizing measured proficiency, an institutionalized dimension contributing to (hyper)polyglot prestige. Indeed, membership in a restricted community on the basis of wide linguistic repertoires exhibits not only symbolic and cultural capital but presumably social capital in the form of connections with one's peers. On the other hand, writer Michael Erard (2012: 213) views hyperpolyglots as a "neural tribe" operating across nations, institutions and communities, united by an idea of mission, a particular identity as well as neural features. This "neural hardware" remarkably fitted to language learning and usage (ibid.: 260) points to some kind of intelligence with commendable connotations.

Hyperpolyglots are indeed an object of fascination within neuroscience, psychology, and linguistics due to the obscurity surrounding these individuals' unique minds (Erard 2005: 40–41). Awareness of such distinguished hyperpolyglots, living or dead, with knowledge of tens of languages (Laes 2013: 12) possibly undergirds the respondents' associations with the term, perhaps adding to its appeal. While Polish *Jowita* identifies as hyperpolyglot through her extensive language skills, Indian *Yes* dreams of becoming one, which speaks to the desirability of the term. Overall, prestige can connote talent, intellect, diligence, refinement, and power in the case of advanced language learners. Even though hyperpolyglots appear to delight in languages for their own sake and seem uninspired by social mobility following these acquired linguistic skills (Erard 2012: 262), versatility in languages nonetheless indicates apparent sociocultural capital also germane to (hyper)polyglot identity narratives, stories about the distinguished self.

As explored, polyglotism has become increasingly praiseworthy in the present day. The phenomenon has indeed gained elevated attention in the media, drawing reports generally from more or less monolingual speakers of English more probably captivated and amazed by the "elusive and mysterious language talent" and the "secret of the multilingual brain" (Pavlenko 2015). English-language media, in particular, seems to contribute to the renowned status of a modern polyglot, which is reflected on the respondents' awareness of the term's attractiveness whether or not they relate to it or not. Varying degrees of fluency in foreign languages can thus be considered out of the ordinary, if not extraordinary, in more or less monolingual societies given the challenges associated with successful language acquisition.

As an illustration, *A nationality confused German*, who lives in the United States, enjoys making "other people's jaws drop" while American *Mr. Montgomery* is partly motivated by "seeing the smile on people's faces when they see an average-looking white guy speak their language". As pointed out earlier, monolingualism is normalized in the Unites States, which seems to undergird the latter's joy in breaking stereotypes of an American speaking exclusively English. An American with multiple language skills is usually considered a polyglot rather than bilingual, a label associated with ethnic and thus disparaged groups (Macedo et al. 2003: 9). Thus, language skills seem to attract respect and admiration in the case of non-racialized dominant-language speakers lacking the need to integrate into American society. Adding to that, foreign language learning in the United States is typically understood as an academic and supplementary interest of privileged monolinguals (Kinginger 2004: 221–222). As a white native English speaker, *Mr. Montgomery* is arguably in a more advantaged position than the speakers of his East-Asian target languages living in his area. Furthermore, foreign language acquisition in the American context can also be seen as a bid for a more intricate and gratifying identity (ibid.). While the respondent denies socioeconomic privilege, his language skills certainly seem to draw attention from others and thus bring about prestige.

Pavlenko (2015) criticizes the "polyglot hype" in media coverage for downplaying the intricacies embedded in language learning, blurring the amount of work and time required for proficiency as well as disregarding the distinct skills and methods people possess and choose to make use of. She also disapproves of the media's selective representation of Westerners, which dismisses the commonplaceness of multilingualism in various corners of the earth. The attention around polyglotism thus consolidates monolingual standards rather than disputes

them. What is more, this enthusiasm overlooks classicists with wide linguistic repertoires dealing with "dead" languages without always speaking them. (Ibid.) The foregoing media hype about avid language learners influences discourses around this avocation.

The glorification of polyglotism indeed affects the respondents' associations with the title, which at times evokes negative reactions in them. Some seem to consider people's tendency to label themselves as polyglots ostentatious, which underlines the self-conscious and elitist aspect of the phenomenon. While Swiss *Jack* conflates the title with bragging and Polish *Kabel* with the exaggeration of one's abilities, German *Batman* finds the term "boastful" and Czech *Fancy Poncho* "pretentious", the latter claiming that "people use it as some kind of a badge to show how special they are". However unfavorable, these views corroborate the word's prestige, maintaining its distinguishing properties. On the other hand, some respondents hesitate to identify as polyglots due to insufficient language skills, self-criticism, or a lack of confidence in their linguistic competences. Canadian *Bom*, for instance, does not consider herself competent or "worthy" enough of adopting such a title given the high standards she has for herself. In a similar vein, Belgian *Kat* does not subscribe to the term due to her perfectionism, only considering the languages she masters at C2 level as languages she actually speaks. These informants link polyglotism with high language proficiency, thus also conscious of the term's status.

Present-day polyglotism has become a phenomenon through enhanced means of communication. The internet, above all, has brought the concept of polyglotism to the attention of individuals, also as an identity option. Canadian *Pseudonym*, for example, mentions encountering the term on Facebook and YouTube roughly five years ago. Polyglots can indeed display their language skills on online platforms such as YouTube (Laes 2013: 12), which adds another layer to the earlier discussed performativity of linguistic pursuits and practices. Through videos, avid language learners can gain popularity amongst viewers captivated by a talent, which illustrates how social media has magnified and intensified polyglot prestige. In today's performative media landscape, effortless communication accompanied by a more or less flawless accent can indeed spark curiosity in admirers, which also speaks to the importance of verbal delivery, communication skills, and in some sense extroverted tendencies in the age of social media. Notwithstanding its lively online presence, polyglotism remains a marginal phenomenon in a world dominated by English as the language of the internet and entertainment, a status quo that does not encourage linguistic diversity.

Polyglot prestige intertwines with various privileges that people actively pursuing various languages tend to possess. Henceforth, I will incorporate markers of these privileges more in my analysis of polyglotism. If investing in a target language, people consciously seek to obtain a broader array of symbolic and material assets that will then amplify their cultural capital (Norton 2013: 50). These "symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money)" (ibid.: 6) appear in the responses in various forms including language skills, polyglot-related admiration, university degrees, professional titles, and social relationships as well as travel, study, and work possibilities in multiple countries. Languages thus diversify their learners' social alternatives in more or less concrete ways.

Based on applied linguist Celeste Kinginger's (2004: 219–220) case study, language learning at home and abroad can be viewed as identity (re-)formation stimulated by a desire to envision oneself afresh. Indeed, investment in a more desirable social identity through language acquisition can magnify one's cultural capital (ibid.: 240). This holds particularly true in work and study abroad contexts. Polish *Matt*, who has been studying in Vienna for four years, indeed views German as his most important language in terms of career and future. Linguistic investments can thus translate into enhanced cultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital in a particular linguistic and cultural environment. Fluency in German allows *Matt* to claim a voice, which grants him agency and legitimacy with its native speakers. In view of Bourdieu's symbolic power, communication necessitates speakers and listeners to consider each other deserving of speaking and of being listened to (Norton 2013: 48). Attainment and refinement of linguistic resources can certainly upgrade a person's social status in a host of social interactions.

The respondents also capitalize on their foreign language proficiency in their countries of origin. Brazilian *Mary*, who teaches English and German, characterizes her language skills as a "life-saver" possibly due to socio-economic challenges. Linguistic competences can thus entail occupational advantages with concrete financial benefits, thus adhering to economic capital. Language skills can also generate movement between social strata. Immigrants, refugees and representatives of language minorities can indeed climb the social ladder by use of prominent languages, which enable the formation of more distinguished and influential identities (Pavlenko 2005: 209). Moreover, the respondents include numerous so-called expatriates and thus more socioeconomically privileged individuals navigating their lives abroad through languages.

As discussed, educational, and professional accomplishments pertain to institutionalized cultural capital, which all of the respondents possess in one form or another. Additionally, nearly half of all the respondents report working or studying in a language-related field, most commonly in the domains of linguistics, literature, or culture. The most frequently occurring job titles include language teacher and translator, which point to academic study of language. This knowledge of linguistics can be regarded as academic capital, requiring theoretical understanding generally attained through higher education. In effect, being acquainted with phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics reflects professionalism and intellectual expertise in a traditional sense. Multiple informants indeed have a background in linguistics, such as German PhD student *André M.* exhibiting scholarly aspirations in this discipline. Also, Canadian *Bom* recognizes the utility of linguistic knowledge when learning languages, which points to advantages obtained through academic capital.

When describing their linguistic inspirations, several respondents mention their passion for reading in second languages. For instance, German literature student *Mohn und Gedächtnis* is primarily propelled by literature, which points to artistic and intellectual interests indicative of cultural, educational, and economic capital. While books as concrete objects pertain to objectified cultural capital according to Bourdieu, fascination with literary works can also be interpreted within the frame of his conception of taste. Indeed, taste refers to inclinations that confirm unavoidable distinction, both connecting and dividing people based on whether they are outcomes of similar or different circumstances (Bourdieu 1979: 59). Following this argument, literary curiosities can carry refined associations setting artistically inclined readers apart from less cultivated individuals. Moreover, literary aspirations pursued in a foreign tongue arguably gain additional prestige. For instance, Slovene *Barbara* adduces her interest in poetry in original languages, which points to both admirable linguistic versatility and creative curiosity. In Bourdieu's (ibid.: 56–57) reasoning, the notion of aesthetic disposition refers to the ability to focus on form rather than practical function when viewing the world, which requires freedom from economic necessity. Thus, a reasonably stable financial situation paired with an educational background can provide fertile ground not only for the appreciation of art but also for polyglotism.

Furthermore, several respondents' interest in Esperanto indicates some level of education coupled with prestige. This world's most widely-spoken auxiliary language was developed for the purposes of unifying people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Reagan

2009: 158, 161). Based on the data, Esperanto seems to be a pastime of individuals vested with enough cultural capital to engage in an artificial language simply out of passion and linguistic curiosity. Adding to that, fascination with its ideological and historical aspects suggests awareness indicative of social and cultural assets. Although Esperanto does not hold worldwide prestige as a largely impractical constructed language, it does distinguish Esperantists from other people as a distinct group joined together by an avocation, thus similar taste. German *Porko* mentions speaking Esperanto with spouse and friends, which points to a lifestyle marked by this particularity. I will later return to the case of Esperanto from the perspectives of social relationships and cultural brokering.

As shown, recreational language learning also indicates appreciation for learning. Polyglotism, in particular, typically embodies continuous pursuit of knowledge even though some respondents also mention their laziness or lack of time to practice. As a language teacher also pursuing other languages by choice, Australian *The Bee guy* is able to show his students that "we are all students of something for most of our lives", which highlights overall learning as an ongoing and lifelong process. This inquisitive mentality is representative of polyglots, who tend to engage in linguistic endeavors repeatedly, often starting from scratch and developing their skills further. Adult language acquisition entails dedication and consistency, which echoes a certain level of educational background even though multiple respondents refer to learning languages on their own.

Moreover, language learning constitutes a constructive and versatile pastime linked with various social, cultural, and educational domains. In the words of Italian *Will P.*, "language study is the only one that includes science, sociology, history, geography… even at basic levels". This multifaceted approach to linguistic aspirations is supported by Chilean *BG*, according to whom language skills provide an access to topics such as "politics, music and art" important in understanding other cultures. Polish *GKJ* views language skills as a testament to one's "learning capabilities and willingness to acquire the [sic] cultural knowledge", which point to both personal achievements and cultural awareness. Furthermore, Japan-based Taiwanese *Chang* believes that language competences show one's "adaptability, willingness to be challenged, competitiveness, and open-mindedness". Linguistic investments can thus be associated with elasticity, perseverance, and receptiveness to different cultures. In addition, the notion of competitiveness echoes widely held conceptions of highly competitive Asian education systems and demanding work life, thus linking language skills with success. The

connection between educatedness and linguistic repertoires further shines through in the following words by American *Andrew*:

> …How could you claim to be fully educated if you've arbitrarily confined yourself to a single culture and a single linguistic environment? (Andrew, S1.)

This response not only alludes to the abundance of language learning possibilities at one's disposal but also suggests that people with broad linguistic repertoires are in some respects more educated and cultured than monolinguals. As discussed, polyglot identities are shaped through contrast to others. Individuals versatile in multiple languages can disapprove of unilingualism that they conflate with intentional ignorance (Sobanski 2016: 168–169). *A nationality confused German* even states feeling sorry for monolinguals, for "there is a part of life, [sic] that they are missing completely". Empathizing with the disadvantaged echoes one's own privileged position in addition to belief in linguistic richness. Conception of multilingualism as "natural and easy" with links to education, inclusiveness and tolerance can contribute to unfavorable perceptions of monolinguals as "deliberately uninformed" (ibid.). Catalan *Jordi*, who lives in the United States, indeed does not understand "how someone can choose to stay monolingual in the 21st century". This statement can be interpreted as a critique of monolingual people's laziness or lack of (intellectual) curiosity about foreign languages particularly in English-speaking contexts notwithstanding a wealth of learning resources available today.

Despite the narrow worldview that it provides, command of English is of great significance in the global age in the field of education and beyond. Across much of the world, being considered an "educated person" indeed seems to nowadays presuppose English skills (Reagan 2009: 74, citation original), which all respondents possess and whose value many emphasize. While Polish *Zuz* calls English "essential", Chilean *BG* illuminates its value in academic contexts in greater detail:

> I consider myself well-educated, because I like to study many topics from biology to linguistics, and I feel privileged of being able to speak and understand English and having the means to learn them. (BG, S2.)

Satisfaction of versatile intellectual curiosity can thus rely upon knowledge of this international language. English has undeniably spread across the globe like no other second language, finding its way into social and academic settings in different countries (Reagan 2009: 153). *BG* clearly alludes to its prevalence within science and academia. In education, as in other influential arenas, English is indeed misrecognized as the only rightful language (Blackledge

& Creese 2010: 9). With backgrounds in linguistics, Donaldo Macedo, Bessie Dendrinos and Panayota Gounari (2003: 16) point out how the acquisition of English has unquestionably been linked with achievement in the form of financial improvement, work opportunities, and enhanced productivity in different parts of the world. Thus, English has undeniable symbolic power. Proficiency in a right type of language serves as linguistic capital (Bourdieu [1982] 2001: 84–85), which native and proficient English speakers possess more than others on a global scale. Competence in a legitimate language ties in with social acceptability, for the ways in which people express themselves via language have an impact on how they are perceived and whether they are listened to in society (ibid.: 83–86). Against this backdrop, knowledge and use of English have particular value in the global era. The controversial case of this world language will be examined from various vantage points throughout this study.

Polyglotism tends to tie in with transnational curiosities, and language skills surely allow one to better follow the news worldwide. Berlin-based American *Kiki* pays attention to how "the press is framing issues in different languages", which is "often surprisingly different!". Her perceptive outlook on reporting suggests a certain level of education distinguishable in a tendency to not only acquire information about timely and cross-national topics but also to call it into question, a skill honed particularly in academic settings. Critical and inquisitive reflection on global media coverage is thus indicative of educational capital that language skills often pertain to. Linguistic competences can also render a person's perspective more informed and impartial, as illustrated by Italian *Taylor*:

> …knowing more than one language is allowing a person to have a more objective idea of basically everything, because you can draw information from different sources. (Taylor, S2.)

The ideal of objectivity is typically linked with education. Besides associations with skepticism and curiosity, the opportunity to consume and use online media is an advantage in itself. In fact, Bangladeshi *Rakesh Ratul* acknowledges the privilege of being able to access the "internet and its unlimited knowledge sources that many people are deprived of". The lack of an internet connection is related to wider socioeconomic issues affecting people's possibilities of pursuing a polyglot lifestyle. Indeed, progress made in a hobby overlaps with how severely one has to strive to survive financially. Voluntary and vehement language learning is thus likely to be the pastime of relatively well-educated and well-to-do people with the interest, time, energy, and means to engage in such an avocation and to potentially travel to countries where their target languages are spoken.

The vast majority of the informants indeed consider themselves more or less privileged, commonly residing or having resided in so-called first world countries with all the benefits that come with it. While fondness for language acquisition or lack thereof cannot simply be explained by socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, the responses show several successful polyglot trajectories with respect to education and mobility. Canadian *Dh* sums up his fortunate situation:

> …Finishing my doctorate right now, have traveled to 50 or so countries (and have lived outside of my native country for over half my life), and was born in a first-world country to middle-class parents, which gave me a lot of opportunities that I could choose to take advantage of. (Dh, S2.)

Dh gives the impression of a highly educated Western expatriate conscious of his privileged position at a global level. Malaysian *SN*, who grew up speaking three languages, also mentions attending "good schools" thanks to his family, residing in several countries around the world and starting his career with numerous advantages. As these examples illustrate, cultural capital is obtained through upbringing as well as schooling (Fowler 1997: 23). Forms of capital tie in with social class, which has commonly referred to "wealth, occupation, education and symbolic behaviour" within social sciences (Block 2007: 37–38). The responses also unveil multiple travel-loving students aware of their educational advantages yet with limited money and time to explore the world. Furthermore, American *Anna* juxtaposes privilege with whiteness by stating that "I am white even if I don't look white", which indicates white privilege and further racism in the United States. Although it cannot be determined that polyglots are predominantly white, most respondents' nationalities as well as their countries of residence point to Western countries. It is therefore justified to assume a link between polyglotism and racialized privilege.

The concept of social class is helpful in grasping identity in its entirety (ibid.: 37–38), as polyglots' narratives of the self are also shaped by their socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite the distinction discussed throughout this chapter, not all informants view themselves as privileged, well-educated, or well-travelled. Several refer to their restricted budget, in particular. Canadian *DTEssence*, who has not passed high school, describes struggling financially and working factory jobs without ever having taken a vacation. French *Globule noire*, who mentions his disability, states being "too broke to travel" while Brazilian *Tamy Weller* claims to "work a lot in order to be able to travel", rejecting any sense of privilege. These examples from three different continents broaden the image of a fervent language learner

beyond advantaged globetrotters. In effect, not everyone is able and willing to travel, study, or work abroad due to various restrictions further explored in Chapter 4.

This chapter has shed light on discourses around polyglotism, a wider phenomenon undergirding individuals' linguistic passions and pursuits. People's personal storylines indeed adhere to broader cultural narratives (Benwell & Stokoe 2006: 139). Although the respondents are drawn to language learning for the pleasure of it, the coveted or rejected title of polyglot arguably carries prestigious and exclusive connotations due to its distinguishing features. Added to that, polyglots tend to hail from relatively privileged backgrounds with more or less cultural capital. They may also invest in new and often more appealing identities through linguistic pursuits. Furthermore, language acquisition constitutes a social practice engaging individuals whose background, involvement, creativity, and inclinations to learning as well as entry to social and cultural domains all contribute to their successes (Kinginger 2004: 241). This gives an idea of the complexities embedded in language learning, which the polyglot hype fails to capture. Not only are polyglots' language learning narratives highly varied, these individuals also foster differing ties to their respective languages. These linguistic bonds will be explored in the following section.

3 Linguistic attachments and detachments

3.1 Ambivalent first language

From the viewpoint of polyglot identities, first language ties are a point of interest equal to those of second languages. As linguist and educator Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 104–106, 108) states, language constitutes an active intermediary and instrument whereby humans envisage, conceptualize, realize, transform, and organize the world as well as construct their various identities. In childhood, this primarily occurs via a mother tongue or several, which can be defined on the basis of origin, competence, function, or identification depending on whether the language(s) is/are the first learned, best known, most used, or the language(s) one identifies with or is identified with by other people. (Ibid.) Notwithstanding this wide definition, the respondents of this study seem to understand their first language from the perspectives of heritage and childhood exposure, thus complying with traditional conceptions of mother tongue. In this chapter, I seek to examine the ambivalent stances that the informants take towards these first languages while acknowledging the emotional, cultural, and sociohistorical complexities underpinning them.

In the sphere of linguistic attachments, an adequate understanding of the interconnection between language and emotion is appropriate. The loaded notion of emotion has been theorized across disciplines such as cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience, all contributing to its various and at times conflicting understandings. The groundwork for the more scientific study of emotion was laid by evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin's work in 1872, who concerned himself with emotional expressions in humans and animals (Bowler 2005: 43). Subsequently, conceptions of emotions as "biologically based, universal inner states" have been challenged by views treating them as culturally produced (Svašek 2005: 8). Indeed, the two-fold quality of emotions as corporal feelings and cultural meanings has been acknowledged within sociology, anthropology, and psychology (Milton 2005: 26). Although this division is not universally recognized due to different language and belief systems across cultures (ibid.), it gives insight into the intricacies of emotions also in the case of polyglots engaged in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural activities.

In keeping with Pavlenko (2005: 3–5), research on the interconnections between emotion and language has generally been fueled by a monolingual bias normalizing monolingual speakers'

perceptions while disregarding the experiences of bi- and multilinguals, who nonetheless make up the majority of the world's population. Questions of language also tie in with nationalism in essential ways (see Heller 1999: 7; Edwards 2013: 22), which I will return to later in this chapter. Associated with high proficiency, first languages are commonly conflated with higher emotional resonance than subsequent and thus more distant languages. Even though this dominant conception is called into question in multiple responses, I will begin by exploring the reactions that do suggest a more or less embodied perception of first language. The notion of language embodiment indicates "sensory images and physiological reactions" elicited by emotionally charged words, both positive and negative (Pavlenko 2005: 155). Although the responses do not unveil vivid portrayals of the sort, a linkage between linguistic ties and personal experiences can nonetheless be established. This connection shines through in *Matt's* affinity with Polish:

> It's the first language of my thoughts and the language of my memories, adolescence, the language of my family that I love. (Matt, S1.)

His words illuminate the significance of formative years for linguistic attachments, particularly in close relationships. The notion of mother tongue quite literally alludes to interactions within the family and thus youthful memories. It is no wonder that numerous informants assign special value to early tongue ties given the well-known importance of youthful beginnings for one's emotional development. Furthermore, first languages can be experienced through speech-related features such as sound, rhythm, and music reminiscent of physical and emotional childhood milieu (Burck 2005: 92). The sound system of a first language becomes more pronounced when one is detached from it and lives through another language (ibid.). *Nose*, who has French and Irish nationalities and studies in Norway, adduces "familiar musicality" in relation to his first languages, which illustrates the relevance of these prosodic aspects for tongue ties.

The intertwinement between linguistic bonds and childhood memories, more pronounced in some accounts than others, proposes a certain degree of language emotionality. In fact, languages learned in natural contexts especially in one's youth are founded on emotional and autobiographic memory, thus involving physical responses and affective connotations, which differs from disembodied words learned in classroom settings at a later age (Pavlenko 2005: 237–238). First languages can thus be experienced as more visceral and intuitive. However, this absence of significant emotional bonds with later learned languages does not automatically

hold true for polyglots invested in various cross-linguistic relationships or otherwise fashioning their personal lives according to their linguistic passions.

For multilingual individuals, first languages can connote greater intimacy, embodiment, authenticity, expressiveness, nuance, creativity, and humor than subsequent languages (Burck 2005: 92–93). In addition to sentiment, the respondents frequently allude to effortlessness and capability when describing their first language usage. For instance, *André M.* feels the most "at home" in his native German, which suggests both familiarity and articulacy. The aptitude for eloquent self-expression and thus effective communication in one's mother tongue connotes naturalness and genuineness, which also tie in with humor and wittiness. I will return to the questions of authenticity in the framework of second language performances. Furthermore, *Amids* views his native French and German as "the languages I know best, and in which I think and dream", which echoes not only language proficiency but also intimacy experienced through linguistic systems learned from birth. He represents a portion of the informants who grew up in a multilingual environment, thus familiar with cross-linguistic differences from an early age. On the whole, the concept of dreaming in a particular language hardly comes up in the responses, which points to its unreliability in determining a person's linguistic inclinations.

As alluded to earlier, affective associations tend to play an integral role in linguistic attachments. Theories on affect are various and cannot be generalized, drawing on multiple academic disciplines (Seigworth & Gregg 2010: 3–5). In lay terms, however, affect can be viewed as a person's bodily response to an object of some kind (Oller & Wiltshire 1997: 34). Notwithstanding the complex interpretations of affect, an awareness of affective attitudes is fruitful in understanding how polyglots navigate multilingual landscapes. The manners in which people express emotions involve cross-linguistic distinctions (Pavlenko 2005: 116–117). Speakers of a particular language have indeed various affective repertoires at their disposal, for emotions are expressed differently in distinct settings on a linguistic, individual, and group level, which leads to "different affective personae" (ibid.). This perception seems to resonate with various respondents accustomed to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural encounters. First language selves seem to be marked by varying degrees of emotionality when it comes to self-expression. For instance, Mexican *Kaixa* emphasizes his more open and thus authentic demeanor granted by Spanish. I will revisit the topic of affective styles in the context of relationships and communication.

While I have thus far examined tongue ties as more or less affective and bodily phenomena, a deeper sociocultural understanding of linguistic attachments is required. American Cuban poet Gustavo Pérez Firmat (2003: 14), who has studied writers bilingual in Spanish and English, draws a distinction between the notions of "lengua", "idioma" and "lenguaje" when examining tongue ties from the viewpoint of language affect rather than linguistic traits. In his view, "lengua" signifies tongue as a physical body part and thus possession, the most intimate and emotional form of language with a kinship status of some kind. The external "idioma", in turn, indicates national or regional loyalties as a language of the community, whereas "lenguaje". refers to language in a structural sense, an abstract system disconnected from people and places. (Ibid.: 16–18.) However entangled these concepts may be in reality, they give some insight into the complexities of linguistic bonds. Be these ties to a language affective, cultural, or cognitive (ibid.), polyglots' tongue ties come across as a highly nuanced matter.

Although I do not thoroughly subscribe to Pérez Firmat's classifications, some parallels can nonetheless be drawn with the findings of the survey. As an illustration, German literature student *Mohn und Gedächtnis* refers to the "German word" as her home while rejecting strong national ties to her country of origin, thus exhibiting a private relationship with her "lengua" rather than "idioma", paired with a presumable appreciation for a more linguistic "lenguaje". That said, several respondents also give prominence to region-specific cultural allegiances. This seems to hold particularly true for some informants residing away from their family or country of origin. Japan-based Taiwanese *Chang*, who grew up in two countries speaking English, Mandarin Chinese, and Filipino along with two dialects, refers to his linguistic beginnings in the words of "ancestry, culture and traditions" that define who he is. His hybrid identity narrative thus seems to draw from multifarious cultural elements.

At a broader level, culture can be understood as systems of shared meanings and social practices whereby people pertaining to the same community, group, or nation seek to fathom the world (Hall 2003: 85). By tying us together and evoking a sense of belonging in us, a common culture plays a pivotal role in the ways in which identities are constructed, maintained, and altered (ibid.). Cultural background can thus bring coherence to one's sense of self in relation to the world, which even transnationally oriented polyglots can find valuable. Other common expressions used to characterize one's linguistic background include "identity", "core", "roots", "foundation", "heritage" as well as "home", all suggesting a solid cultural bond. With temporal and local dimensions, culture constitutes a framework connecting

individuals to the ways of life of previous generations and thus historical continuity of meanings (ibid.: 94–95), this idea holding special value to people who grew up away from their country of birth or that of their parents. As an illustration of this distance, Canadian *Bom* of South Korean origin illuminates the intricate relationship between language, culture and identity:

> Having grown up away from my birth country and speaking primarily English, Korean is a very symbolic and significant aspect in my life. It reminds me of my family and keeps me grounded to my roots and heritage. I consider it an integral part of my identity and sense of self. (Bom, S2.)

Mother tongues shape and symbolize people's identities (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 104–105), as shown here. Associated with familial ties and cultural legacy, Korean comes through as an essential and meaningful facet of *Bom's* self-narrative. In her case, being bilingual also interweaves with being bicultural. With a background in psychology, John Edwards (2013: 20) gives weight to the two or more ethnocultural groups that bi- and multilingual people can pertain to. Childhood bilinguals, in particular, can foster dual or several loyalties. Minority language speakers especially are often forced to give thought to the questions of language and identity, as their languages tend to serve different communicative and symbolic purposes. (Ibid.: 21, 23.) *Bom's* relationship with Korean certainly reflects symbolic value. Furthermore, first language ties can adhere to ethnic affinity in contexts where one is racialized by others. Language can indeed mark "racialized identities, ethnicities and cultural identities" (Burck 2005: 33), a theme I will return later to in this chapter.

Although several respondents attach value to their cultural heritage, they do not, by and large, foster strong national ties to their countries of origin on the basis of language. As linguistic anthropologist Monica Heller (1999: 7) points out, language has historically played a pivotal role in the construction of nations not only by creating unity through common practices and values but also by validating the existence of nations. With backgrounds in social sciences, Pakkasvirta & Saukkonen (2005: 14–15) state that with an emphasis on this shared language, religion, and national character, nationalism has been thought to promote people's national identities while dividing the world into nations and nation-states. Political scientist Benedict Anderson ([1983] 2006: 6) famously views nation as an "imagined political community", whose members will never meet most of each other in particular yet feel a sense of community through imagination. If nations are envisioned as monolingual entities, globally oriented

polyglots drawn to languages and sensitive to diversity may hesitate to subscribe to such concepts.

On an individual level, national identity indicates one's membership in a political community which they have often grown up and built their lives in (Parekh 2008: 56–57). Although cultural and national ties can easily enmesh, nation-states as political systems are likely to evoke different connotations in informants from across the globe. Furthermore, the respondents do not appear to link their first language with a patriotic sentiment. Pride in one's nation as well as first language is in fact rejected by multiple respondents, which can be explained not only by negative connotations with one's home country but also consciousness of global interrelatedness coupled with appreciation of linguistic and cultural abundance, which can result in reluctance to confine oneself to a specific nation-state. The arbitrariness of one's beginnings is illustrated by German *Laprasman* and Slovak *Maroula*, who both use the expression "pure coincidence" when referring to their home country and first language, respectively.

The respondents also seem to have varying understandings of patriotism. While *Barbara* takes pride and is protective of small and archaic Slovene without any particular patriotic sentiment, American *Mr. Montgomery* does feel patriotic about his home country, which reflects the positivity around the term in the United States. He does not conflate his loyalty to the country with linguistic attachments, however, which echoes the high status that English holds in the American context through monolingual ideologies. Overall, conceptions of patriotism can be considered both ideological and affective, for the word evokes some kind of emotional reactions in the informants, whose understandings of the term are further influenced by wider belief systems. The notion of patriotism will be revisited in Chapter 4 from the viewpoint of global perspectives.

While national ties are not widely celebrated, linguistic minorities understandably tend to feel more strongly about their identities and thus their place in the world. Language minorities can be considered groups of people left out by nationalisms (Heller 1999: 7). In addition to serving as indicators of identity, languages can function to segregate, oppose, empower, or support minority or majority groups (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 3–4). In light of this, Russian *Angie* from Kazan depicts Tatar as the foundation of her identity, disheartened to witness her culture and first language disappear day after day, which indicates a stark affinity with a linguistic

minority facing challenges in Russia. The country's political climate can be considered from the perspective of a center-periphery binary, which underscores the dominance of the powerful over different types of marginalized minorities (Huttunen 2005: 4).

As a member of a linguistic minority, *Angie's* identity struggles are underpinned by the country's hegemonic language ideologies. As Robert Phillipson (1992: 72), who is concerned with language pedagogy, language policy, and language rights, incisively articulates, "hegemony refers to dominant ideas that we take for granted". In view of philosopher Antonio Gramsci's work, Adrian Blackledge (2004: 71–72), who has researched multilingualism and linguistic minorities, applies the concept of hegemony to power dynamics embedded in language usage. Part of a dominant ideology, certain conceptions become normalized through assumed "discourse practices of symbolic domination" (ibid.) According to Bourdieu, symbolic domination occurs when a particular language or variety is not only favored and legitimized by dominant groups and institutions but "misrecognized" as superior by subjugated groups as well (Blackledge & Creese 2010: 8–9). The prestigious status that Russian holds is reflected on the informant's native level proficiency in the language.

Russia's language policies thus impact *Angie's* subject position as a member of a linguistic minority. As suggested above, languages can be claimed to negotiate and resist specific identities and provide fresh identity alternatives for mistreated and subordinated individuals and groups (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 13). *Angie* seems to cherish, take pride, and feel protective of Tatar, negotiating her identities in response to homogenizing belief systems and damaging language attitudes positioning her in unsatisfactory ways as a minority language speaker. Despite referring to Russia as her home country, she prefers to emphasize her connection to the Republic of Tatarstan, which further accentuates her support and solidarity with this linguistic and cultural minority. *Angie's* situation bears a resemblance to Bhabha's metaphor of "third space" between a dominant society and a minority community. The hybrid features in her identity narrative speak to the complexities and multiplicities of identities. Additionally, her linguistic perspectives are diversified by a fascination with foreign languages, which should not go unmentioned when investigating a person's tongue ties, all of them legitimate and valuable.

The notion of dialect appears from time to time in the respondents' first language characterizations. What differentiates a language from a dialect is generally a political rather

than a linguistic question (e.g. Bailey 2007: 357). According to the well-known saying, language can be understood as a dialect with a navy and an army (e.g. Bailey 2007: 357; Edwards 2009: 5; Laes 2013: 21; Reagan 2009: 7). A dialect, then, can be considered a form of a language, distinct from others in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation also known as accent (Edwards 2009: 63). Italian respondents, in particular, often adduce their local dialect in addition to formal language used in educational contexts, a tendency explained by a multitude of regional dialects as well as languages spoken across the country. As an illustration, *Will P.* mentions the minority language of Sicilian, while *Zahra* brings up her Genoese dialect paired with an interest in learning Sardinian. The latter also in part associates home with speaking her dialect, which further accentuates the salience of linguistic varieties in Italy. These often mutually unintelligible speech forms can be considered indicators of regional identities, to a certain degree compensating for a fragile national identity that has its roots in the developmental challenges of the present-day standard Italian (Ruzza 2000: 168). This historical backdrop is salient in understanding the linguistic and regional loyalties that these informants seem to foster.

Language varieties can indeed disclose a person's connection to a specific linguistic, social, ethnic, or national group (Edwards 2009: 21). For instance, Slovak *Maroula* raises her Ruthenian ethnicity and two dialects spoken at home while growing up. While referring to her first language as "pure coincidence", she appears to give weight to her upbringing in a border region inhabited by her minority, which suggests both linguistic and cultural ties to this marginal group. Furthermore, she reports speaking a dialect called Šariš with her husband, yet also using standard Slovak in public, thus drawing a distinction between private and public language use. Besides facilitating communication between speakers of different dialects, this conformity to the norm arguably reflects hegemonic language ideologies. As pointed out earlier, people's competence in a legitimate language impacts the way in which they are seen and whether they are considered deserving of being listened to. Dialects may carry pejorative connotations in certain social contexts as improper deviations from a supposed ideal language form (Edwards 2009: 65). This power dynamic underpins speakers' language choices that can also be determined by various other factors, as will be illuminated in Chapter 3.3.

Native speakers of this study do not call attention to this stigmatized status of dialects, however. Conversely, linguistic varieties are brought up in neutral or affectionate terms from the perspective of emotional and cultural value. The fact that these dialects merit mention is

indicative of their feasibility as identity options. Overall, dialectal diversity not only broadens our common understanding of language but also that of linguistic identity narratives. While a first language can evoke positive connotations of a specific language variety together with childhood, family, and heritage, it can also constitute a source of discomfort. *Noriko Y.* from California is illustrative of this tension, characterizing her native Spanish as a marker of a fragmented identity:

> It actually is my least favorite language. It represents a broken identity almost. Growing up it was important to assimilate but I wasn't American enough to fit it and yet with family in Mexico, I wasn't Mexican enough for them. Spanish is now associated with an identity struggle for me. (Noriko Y., S1.)

Assimilation as such can be understood as the assumption of characteristics pertaining to a new culture at the cost of those of one's old, a process that changes one's sense of cultural belonging to a specific ethnic community (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000: 123–124). This "cultural rebirth" (Parekh 2008: 83) constitutive of assimilation does not successfully capture *Noriko Y.'s* conflicted experience, however. Her perceived Mexican identity indeed appears to have been stigmatized and more or less non-negotiable throughout her formative years**,** leaving her in a liminal state between different cultural systems, a position echoing Bhabha's conception of "third space". The hybridity of her cultural identity is further supported by her linguistic and cultural detachment from Mexico. Added to that, children of linguistic minorities who predominantly speak the dominant language may struggle to connect with their family and cultural background, which can lead to identity struggles as well as experiences of rootlessness and alienation (Skutnabb-Kangas 1986: 59).

Noriko Y.'s "broken identity" can be examined in the wider societal framework of Americanization. As linguist Dominika Baran (2017: 50–51) notes, the expectation of immigrants to blend in is encapsulated in the well-known and controversial metaphor of a melting pot, which depicts the more or less feasible intermingling of ethnicities and cultures in the United States. In the public discussion, Latino immigrants are represented as a menace to American identity due to their failure to assimilate, which shows in their use of Spanish rather than English. In this discourse, Spanish imposes a real and symbolic threat to Americanness, associated with illegal immigrants typically envisaged as Latinos and more specifically Mexicans. Spanish can thus be seen as a racialized language, a marker of difference in the American context. (Ibid.: 71–72, 92–93.) This power dynamic representative of American immigration tendencies undergirds the respondent's identity struggles.

Furthermore, Mexicans have historically been "racialized as political and cultural others" in the Unites States even though this diverse group cannot be treated as a monolith (Rivera 2006: 20). Not being "American enough" may coincide with various identity categories. While language speaking can index several subject positions, a person's "racialized identity, ethnicity, gender and class" also influence the ways in which they are positioned in several languages and cultures (Burck 2005: 23). In this vein, *Noriko Y.'s* conflict suggests intricate identity negotiations in response to societal power structures. Against the backdrop of English language hegemonies and presumable experiences of othering, her difficulties with first language attachment become more nuanced.

Noriko Y.'s conflict clearly underscores the private nature of linguistic bonds. As Pérez Firmat (2003: 163) eloquently formulates, "bilingual blues equals bilingual bliss", an observation aimed to illuminate the intensity of writers bilingual in Spanish and English. This poignant claim encapsulates the messiness of entangled tongue ties, more or less discernible also in the words of *Noriko Y.*, whose painful and thus intimate relationship with Spanish comes through in her account. Bilingualism can indeed connote pain for those fashioning their significant life events in two or more languages (ibid.: 6). Furthermore, access and immersion in multiple linguistic worlds can entail divided affections and belongings in addition to more well-known bilingual benefits and more broadly polyglot pleasures.

In Burck's (2005: 173–175) research, numerous multilingual individuals approached their linguistic practices through the construct of doubleness, which manifested itself in so-called inner and outer as well as lived and imagined selves. Doubleness was also invoked in the context of identities divided by time and space as a result of migration along with the experience of two different linguistic worlds, commonly private and public (ibid.). This two-fold mindset seems to somewhat characterize *Noriko Y.'s* childhood shaped by two geographical locations and different languages spoken at home and in school. Moreover, moving between distinct linguistic and cultural settings can engender disorder and disconnectedness in individuals' identity narratives (Burck 2005: 171–172). This conflict seems to reflect *Noriko Y.*'s challenges. English, which does not spark much linguistic curiosity in her, is referred to as "more natural", thus associated with effortlessness and convenience in a context that privileges it. She has indeed had to position herself as a speaker of both minority and dominant language, thus navigating the power relations between them. Avid language learners' multi-faceted linguistic experiences tend to go beyond duality, however. *Noriko Y.*

indeed redesigns her identity narrative beyond bilingualism through extensive language choices. Thus, the complexities of her multiple subjectivities should not be reduced to her early linguistic trajectory but understood more broadly.

Furthermore, several informants mention English as their first language. Drawing on Braj Kachru's model, linguist Anna Wierzbicka (2006: 5–6, citation original) accentuates the existence of numerous varieties of English worldwide, of which English of the "inner circle" indicates countries where it is conventionally the principal language, thus distinct from "outer circle" or in other words "new Englishes". Overlapping with the former category, her notion of Anglo-English with its cultural foundations lies at the core of "talking about English in the singular" (ibid.: 13). Native English speakers of this survey typically hail from or reside in Western countries and thus represent older varieties of English. However, the respondents do not disclose particularly affective portrayals of cultural heritage or linguistic features such as accents dear to them in their respective language varieties.

By contrast, the informants primarily depict English in the light of its prevalence, which American *Mr. Montgomery* finds "very valuable". As a language of "modernity, progress, globalization and free market" (Piller 2018: 149), English dominates the world. It carries out major societal tasks in various areas such as trade, consumerism, popular culture, academia, education, literature, and military (Phillipson 2009: 92). Despite, or precisely due to its dominance on a global scale, English as a first language comes across as devoid of major sentiment in the responses. Through globalization, it has become the shared property of people from a plethora of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which can explain its lack of appeal to those who speak it as their mother tongue. A universal language scarcely in need of protection may be experienced as impersonal and detached, mainly appreciated for its facility and convenience. Canadian *Pseudonym* is illustrative of this mindset:

> … English is so mainstream. If my first language were a minority language (e.g. if I were French Canadian) then I'm sure it would be much more important to me. In my case, English is only important to me because it's the easiest language to express myself in but I don't feel an emotional connection to it. (Pseudonym, S2.)

Pseudonym seems to associate English with effortless and articulate self-expression, downplaying its affective value. This lack of emotional bond can be interpreted in the context of power relations. As a native dominant-language speaker in Ontario, his first language identity presumably goes uncontested by others, and this absence of conflict is reflected in his

less intimate tongue ties. Linguistic attachments are indeed often intertwined with power struggles. Due to this comparatively privileged position, *Pseudonym* may not feel overly compelled to negotiate his identities in response to prevalent language discourses more or less calling for uniformity, a tendency that arguably marks strong minority language identities. That said, he does foster a solid emotional connection with Jewish languages, which will be examined in the following chapter.

Furthermore, referring to English as "so mainstream" reflects its pervasiveness not only in *Pseudonym's* home province but in transnational contexts more broadly. This commonplaceness linked to the language is also familiar to American *Yossel*, who describes it as "sort of boring but enchanting at times", which carries connotations to a mundane communication tool coupled with occasional linguistic delights. However, the informants' conceptions of English go beyond its present-day prevalence, recognizing its destructive history in the subordination of other languages and cultures. *The Bee guy* from Australia is reminded of this sinister past of the colonial language:

> It is the language responsible for the suppression of Native Australian languages, and as such the language of violence and hatred. (The Bee guy, S2.)

This statement reflects the well-known history of discrimination against Indigenous Australians under English colonial rule. Australia's Aborigines have indeed undergone extensive damage vis-à-vis language, culture and religion notwithstanding some area-specific survival and revitalization (Leitner & Malcolm 2007: 1). As Macedo et al. (2003: 34) note, linguistic and cultural intrusion are firmly linked. Furthermore, language suppression ties in with linguistic discrimination. Coined by Skutnabb-Kangas, the term "linguicism" points to linguistically argued racism restricting minority language speakers' linguistic human rights particularly within education (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1995: 72, 104, 106). As Phillipson (1992: 47, 55) articulates, linguicism encompasses practices and belief systems through which "unequal allocation of power and resources" is generated and sustained based on language. As a subset of linguicism, English linguistic imperialism involves the ongoing reconstruction of "structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages". Institutional, financial, and ideological factors thus legitimize the dominance of English in educational contexts. (Ibid.) Australia's indigenous languages have certainly suffered from language policies that typify the above-described power imbalances.

The Bee guy's negative first language connotations are thus informed by historical understandings. These language injustices seem to interlink with his anti-nationalist politics, as the statement "I would rather certain aspects of our culture improve before I claim to be patriotic" suggests. Furthermore, awareness of linguistic oppression occasionally seems to draw polyglots to indigenous languages also out of solidarity, as will be discussed in Chapter 4 in greater detail. In addition to the animosity and boredom associated with English as a first and dominant language, more uplifting views exist as well, as American *Andrew* elucidates:

> English is a beautiful language with a beautiful history, a wealth of literary tradition, etc. "The language of business" is an insult, in my opinion, to any language. (Andrew, S1.)

As a reader, *Andrew* sees beauty in English, cherishing its literary accomplishments and aesthetic contributions to the world of art. As the language of great literature, English should not be reduced to a language of trade in his mind. While the language has indeed produced renowned works and thus carries refined connotations in the literary arena, its "beautiful history" is nonetheless closely intertwined with colonialism. Beautiful or oppressive, a language can never be neutral.

As shown through several examples, multiple respondents also seem to experience little emotional attachment to their first languages. In fact, many write dismissively about their mother tongue through expressions such as "nothing special" and "nothing important", thus trivializing the value of the language most familiar to them. For Canadian *Dh*, English is "just the language of the culture I was born into", which points to broader awareness and appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity representative of language enthusiasts. Furthermore, *Fancy Poncho* mentions perhaps taking her native Czech for granted because she did not have to work for it, which underlines language skills as personal achievements attained through diligence. *Evathefirst* of Russian and Ukrainian nationality, in turn, is glad to be a native speaker of Russian that she thus does not need to learn, which also echoes language learning ambitions. Malaysian *SN*, who grew up speaking English, Mandarin, and Malay, denies any affectionate ties to these languages while still acknowledging their impact on him:

> They are responsible for my linguistic and cognitive biases. I don't feel any sentimental attachment to languages. (SN, S2.)

While *SN* speaks dispassionately of these early learned tongues, they are significant to the way he interprets information and relates to the world. *NorthernLass*, who has found a home abroad and feels more strongly about a second language, expresses similar detachments when referring to her native German as a "very precise language, but without emotion". While the informants

occasionally belittle the sentimental value of their first and typically most familiar and strongest language, a high proficiency in at least one language can be considered of paramount importance. According to French *Trezoq*, "even monolingual people are better armed at understanding the world, and making themselves understood if they master their own language well". Good linguistic skills arguably aid in abstract thinking and problem-solving, for instance. As alluded to earlier, not everyone is able to exercise their linguistic human rights, however. While minority language speakers fail to receive education in their mother tongue essentially everywhere in the world (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1995: 71), most respondents of this survey at least associate their first language with easiness, however affective these tongue ties may be.

The respondents' linguistic appreciations also adhere to instrumental value, for a first language is frequently portrayed as an advantage in life with respect to career prospects or as a mere tool to communicate with one's surroundings. While Belgian *Kat* adduces an "easy daily life" coupled with an ability to understand what is happening in her country, German *Porko* brings up the importance of being well-versed in German when studying law in this language. A mother tongue is also repeatedly recognized for its utility when learning target languages due to its similar vocabulary or structure. *Ezra*, who finds her native Dutch limiting when abroad, indeed appreciates its closeness to German. Meanwhile, *Will P.* and *Batman* view Italian and German as a "main point of reference" and a root to compare other languages to, respectively. A first language is thus regularly determined in relation to other more beneficial or engaging languages, although it can also be cherished for its rich lexicon or for providing access to captivating literature. *Jowita* enjoys reading Polish literature, for instance. On the whole, the respondents tend to write dismissively about their first language while showing more enthusiasm with regard to self-acquired languages. These similarly ambivalent linguistic bonds will be explored in the following chapter.

3.2 Second language ties

The meanings that polyglots assign to their second languages are versatile and manifold, reflecting both specific and wider sociocultural contexts in which they negotiate their identities. Sobanski's (2016: 171–172) multilingual research participants not only adopted a particular polyglot identity but also often referred to a distinct sense of self attached to each language they used. In a similar fashion, second languages offer my focus group ways to reimagine

themselves and to rewrite their more or less hybrid identity narratives. Furthermore, languages are given meanings in connection with each other (Burck 2005: 92), which gives prominence to a polyglot existence. In fact, Block (2007: 190) adduces the salience of multilinguals' existing, at times extensive, linguistic repertoires for their identity work when engaging in a target language. In what follows, I will shed light on polyglots' varying emotional attachments to their second languages, namely how these ties are formed and fostered.

As noted earlier, the language of one's early years has traditionally been perceived as emotionally superior. The duality of the first language as a core language spoken by "us" and the second language as a language of separation used by "them" fails to properly recognize the complex linkages between emotions, languages, and identities of people with various language skills (Pavlenko 2005: 233, 236, citation original). A large number of the informants indeed obscure this dichotomy, exhibiting affective appreciations expressly towards their intentionally and actively developed language skills, often fostering little fascination for their mother tongue. While *Mr. Montgomery* characterizes his second languages as children that he loves equally, *Pimenthée* refers to her languages as a family she has chosen, hence "lifelong friends". These depictions underline the affectionate aspect of voluntary language acquisition also fruitful for identity negotiations.

Furthermore, the line between first and subsequent languages can become blurred in multilingual contexts. Spanish *Helen*, who has been exposed to English her whole life for family reasons and now studies in the United Kingdom, refers to it as almost her "first and a half" language, which elucidates the ambiguity of tongue ties. As Baran (2017: 12–13) justly argues, often applied and ostensibly self-evident yet hugely questionable notions such as "mother tongue" and "native speaker" fail to capture the fluidity and continuousness germane to hybridity, which disarrays and confuses boundaries between prevalent social and cultural classifications. Linguistic phenomena can thus be better examined through flexibility and inconstancy than binary and dichotomous understandings (ibid.) This elasticity is embodied by polyglots engaging in linguistic and cultural border-crossings and exhibiting varying degrees of competence and intimacy with their respective languages. The shifting nature of linguistic ties is further illustrated by Serbian *Ela*, who refers to Spanish as her "second mother tongue", feeling "quite natural" using it and intent on mastering it. By transcending linguistic confines, vehement language learners rewrite their identity narratives.

As touched on, polyglots generally do not relate to their languages in the same way. In the words of German *Batman*, "they all feel different". Burck's (2005: 171) study reveals how multilingual individuals create distinct meanings as well as adopt and are assigned different positions in each language. Moreover, her interviewees perceived themselves differently depending on the language in question irrespective of the age and conditions of their language acquisition (ibid.). In a similar vein, the informants of this study assign particular meanings to their respective languages. American *Kiki*, who lives in Berlin, sums up the different roles that second languages play in her life:

> Each has a different meaning. French connects me to my grandmother and ancestry. German connects me to my current home. Spanish makes me feel like a savvy adult. The others make me feel like a serious language learner. (Kiki, S2.)

Later learned languages can thus mark a myriad of matters such as heritage, belonging, self-expression and commitment, some more intimately than others woven into one's identity narrative. *Kiki's* tongue ties also reveal spatial and temporal dimensions in the form of home and descent, which accentuates the narrative nature of identity formation. As identities are imaginatively constructed through memories, experiences and perceptions (Lawler 2008: 11), languages that one lives through are of considerable importance. While savviness in Spanish indicates fluency to express oneself in a witty and astute manner, feeling like a "serious language learner" suggests little emotional attachment, which points to a more or less beginner level in languages possibly acquired in formal settings. I will return to this topic of disembodiment. The intensity of polyglots' tongue ties thus varies a great deal, which becomes apparent in the words of *Jordi* from Catalonia:

> Depends on the language. Spanish and English have close to no emotional attachment. Polish and Welsh on the other hand are very close to me because I lived some of my most formative years as an adult through these two languages. (Jordi, S1.)

Jordi's example demonstrates how affective ties can also be formed at a later age, which highlights the fluidity and flexibility of identities fashioned through optional language learning especially in transnational contexts. His self-acquired languages, which are closely linked with his experiences of studying abroad, come across as more affect-laden than English as a universal language and Spanish as the official language of Spain historically oppressive towards his home region, both of which he has been exposed to from an early age. While these global and colonial languages with historical baggage do not emotionally resonate with him, self-chosen ones, in turn, seem to offer this PhD student in linguistics more possibilities to redefine himself. Indeed, adults moving abroad and learning a language voluntarily are able to

reinvent themselves by adopting fresh identities along with new self-expression and aptitude for risk-taking, benefiting from breaking presumptions through the new language (Burck 2005: 99). Polish and Welsh seem to have granted *Jordi* new ways to position himself in different contexts.

Second languages can also provide emotional separation, which can be experienced in positive and creative terms. Pavlenko (2005: 179–184) examines the imaginative freedom and sentimental detachment granted by a later acquired language in the context of translingual fiction writers sometimes wishing to distance themselves from the oppression and sufferings of their past. Through a "stepmother language", these authors are able to utilize new untainted words disconnected from their memories of childhood and trauma. Kellman's concept of "emancipatory detachment" depicts this experience. (Ibid., citation original.) Although the responses do not unveil disturbing experiences or express explicit literary ambitions, this emotional alienation from one's first language in favor of their second is disclosed by some informants, who allude to more straightforward self-expression enabled by a later learned tongue. *Noriko Y.*, who associates her native Spanish with an identity crisis, feels freer to be herself in a second language because the "social constructs are different", which also in part points to emancipatory separation.

In addition, *NorthernLass* who has found a home in Scotland finds it easier to express her emotions in English than in her native German describing it as "with no emotion", as noted earlier. Even when a mother tongue may not significantly evoke emotions, it is nonetheless attached to youthful experiences and thus to some extent embodied. Furthermore, speakers of a certain language interpret and categorize feelings based on the emotional lexicon that it provides (Wierzbicka 2004: 94). The respondents thus rely on distinct emotion words in their respective languages, which impacts their subjective experiences of self-expression. Above all, *NorthernLass'* case demonstrates that some sort of indifference towards a first language can be replaced by a special bond with another and that linguistic and cultural identities can be renegotiated. Vietnamese *Brunaco,* who moved to Canada at the age of sixteen, also feels more comfortable expressing his ideas and emotions in his second language compared to his first. Proper immersion in a universal and thus highly advantageous language at a relatively young age could have affected his expressiveness in English. Both respondents live in contexts where their most expressive language is used and valued, which further contributes to their ease in

using it. While these experiences of English are positive, I will later examine more contradictory views on the global language as a later learned tongue.

Engagement in a specific language may be propelled by the images that polyglots foster of particular speech communities. To illustrate the significance of imagination more broadly, Norton (2013: 8) draws on the well-known concept of imagined community by political scientist Benedict Anderson introduced earlier. Akin to nations, imagined communities can encompass social groups that language learners wish to be part of, communities less approachable and palpable than regular interactions in more concrete groups and institutions. These envisioned affiliations can evoke a sense of connection in language learners paralleled with the communities of their everyday lives. (Ibid.) Based on the responses, an infatuation with a given language is indeed frequently accompanied by some kind of identification with a target language community. In their daily lives, Chilean *BG* listens to music in Danish and Slovak *Maroula* to a broadcast in Swedish, the latter stating that it "feels like Sweden" a little bit. Through speaking, reading or writing their target language, individuals both interact with the target language community and reconstruct their sense of self in connection with the world (Norton 2013: 4). Furthermore, *Miss Tao* from England wants to learn Mandarin Chinese, hoping to live in China as an English teacher one day. The importance of dreams and fantasies for identity narratives thus ought not to be overlooked.

Creativity adheres to polyglot practices in various ways. Pérez Firmat (2003: 163) views bilingualism first and foremost as a personal matter, referring to it as "intimate theatre". As an illustration, Turkish *Destina* states feeling "like a different person" when speaking another language, taking pleasure in pretending to be someone else. Imitation certainly constitutes a manner of distancing oneself from the banality of daily life, perhaps through a language comprised of disembodied words. Additional languages can indeed be viewed as clothes that people can put on and take off when needed (Skutnabb-Kangas 1986: 41–42). For polyglots, this versatility is characteristically a joy. Polyglotism can indeed be interpreted as a form of escapism, thus creative immersion in linguistic and cultural realms more compelling than one's familiar linguistic beginnings. Entering into a new language can thus be experienced as a liberating and even empowering escapade, a way to reimagine oneself.

Similarly to reiterative and diligent language learning as a pastime, the reality of experiencing life through a second language can be considered performative. This role-playing tendency

becomes particularly pronounced in *Destina's* affinity for imitation. Moreover, Bangladeshi *Rakesh Ratul* believes that language learning is "more about acting like the natives" than about the acquisition of grammatical details, which alludes to the salience of playful immersion in a target language. Western conceptions of identity have traditionally set performative "doing" and more authentic "being" in opposition, thus enclosing a contrast between "semblance and substance" (Lawler 2008: 101). However, social identities can be understood as self-performances, in other words self-impersonations through which humans adopt traits that they claim to possess. Taking her cue from Goffman, Lawler explains how the diverse, changing, and potentially conflicting roles that people perpetually play amount to who they are rather than masking authentic persons. (Ibid.: 103–104, 106.)

These performances are often enacted through languages, some of which may evoke conflicting sentiments in polyglots. Although the aforementioned respondents seem to experience linguistic play as imaginative and carefree, performativity embedded in language usage can also be viewed through the lens of inauthenticity. According to Burck (2005: 177), people learning to experience life through a new language are obliged to repeatedly perform linguistic identities in ways that feel artificial to them. One's second language can thus be linked with a sense of false self (ibid.: 174). Although this conflict arguably becomes more apparent in migration contexts where power relations are more pronounced and conformity is expected, an experience of rigidity or inarticulacy in a foreign tongue is certainly known to adult language learners in a host of circumstances. While Canadian *Dh* knows "how it feels to speak a language clumsily" due to his years spent in South Korea, *Anna* claims to occasionally feel "stupid" when not remembering how to say something that she wishes to communicate, a situation typical of multilingual lives. Inarticulacy in a given language can indeed influence its speakers deeply (ibid.: 79), evoking a sense of disconnect when one's verbal delivery and thus sense of self is questioned. One's accent, in particular, can mark difference from native speakers.

As Baran (2017: 281–282) observes, multilinguals frequently feel strongly about the sounds and symbolic dimensions of their multiple languages, aware of difficulties in translating not only expressions but also the emotions underlying them. In her autobiography, Polish-Canadian author and academic Eva Hoffman ([1989]1998: 106–107) depicts a detachment between the signifier and the signified, as words in her adopted language are devoid of the meanings that they carry in her mother tongue. This "radical disjoining between word and thing" eradicates the naturalness of reactions, complicates translation and deprives the world

of its colors (ibid.). Although the responses do not disclose particularly painful portrayals of this disconnect, it nonetheless seems to be widely recognized amongst language learners. *Will P.* indeed brings forth the impossibility of expressing certain matters in the same way irrespective of language. Meanwhile, *Anna* adduces the challenges of translating songs, poems and jokes, whose nuances are arguably lost in the process of language alternation. Art and humor may indeed fail to transfer into another language, necessitating an appreciation for wordplay and/or an understanding of cultural references. Moreover, translations and interpretations may occasionally come across as insincere or fraudulent to linguistically inclined individuals.

Thus, even polyglots who characteristically feast on language play can experience emotional restraint and detachment through their language learning trajectories. In the words of *Will P.*, "there's something that can only be understood by living the language and speaking it, being part of it and letting it flow into you and from you, to the point where it becomes natural…". This aspiration for naturalness suggests reservedness typical of early stages of adult language acquisition. Indeed, a later learned language may be experienced as colder, more foreign and external as well as poorer in nuances (Skutnabb-Kangas 1986: 40). Over time, however, a new language loses its stiffness (ibid.: 41). Through the process of "coming to own a language", an individual's performance begins to feel more genuine (Burck 2005: 84). By and large, the respondents well-versed in and enthusiastic about languages do not overly concern themselves with this initial rigidity, however. Immersion in linguistic pleasures indeed seems to trump insecurities related to language learning, which shows the passion-driven nature of polyglotism.

Self-evidently, polyglots' tongue ties are founded on emotions that also steer their linguistic pursuits. Emotions indeed affect people's language choices, possibly propelling individuals to create substitute or supplementary identities in second languages (Pavlenko 2005: 193). As noted earlier, emotion is a multi-faceted topic. Although emotions can also be interpreted as subjective and private phenomena (Lutz 2007: 26–27), there is value in examining them as relational phenomena in the context of linguistic attachments. Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed ([2004] 2014) portrays emotions as social and cultural practices as opposed to inner states. She (ibid.: 208–209) places emphasis on the power of emotions to move us in the form of physical reactions, these movements being orientations towards and away from things. This framework

is fruitful in demystifying polyglots' bonds with their target languages, for avid language learners are indeed moved by their linguistic interests.

Movement intertwines with attachment, for things that move humans emotionally also adhere them to others or evoke a sense of home in them (ibid.:11). The earlier discussed case of *NorthernLass*, who nurtures a connection with English and Scotland, is illustrative of how linguistic bonds can also tie in with social belongings. Added to that, emotions attach polyglots to their target language communities. The informants indeed regularly characterize a sometimes-inexplicable curiosity towards a given language. While Dutch makes *NorthernLass* smile, Polish *Leafar* fell in love with Russian. Furthermore, taking a liking to a particular language is affected by one's relationship with the social world. Indeed, "feelings may stick to some objects and slide over others" (Ahmed [2004] 2014): 8), which bears resemblance to how certain languages can elicit strong reactions in individuals while others remain trivial to them. Predominant social discourses influence which languages are valued and preferred in a given context, which brings relations of power to the fore. Polyglots' linguistic inclinations thus do not develop in a vacuum, detached from the surrounding society and prevalent cultural flows. Their perceptions of their respective languages are indeed shaped by broader social and historical frameworks that provide them with identity options. Canadian *Pseudonym*, whose weak in-group identification regarding English was examined in the previous chapter, offers further insight into his national, cultural, and linguistic loyalties:

> …if I travel abroad, I'm proud to say I'm from Canada, but again it doesn't hold the kind of emotional connection for me that Israel does (even though I've never lived there) because if I were to compare, my Jewish identity is ultimately stronger than my Canadian identity… Certain Jewish languages (Hebrew, Yiddish) also have cultural significance for me because I am Jewish so I feel a special connection to them when learning them, even though I didn't grow up hearing them around me. (Pseudonym, S2.)

His depiction of Jewish identity does not disclose whether the affinity with Hebrew and Yiddish stems from ethnic, cultural, and/or religious elements. Jewishness is a controversial and multi-layered topic that has been perceived from diverse angles from religion to biology (Glenn & Sokoloff 2010: 3–4). Jewish identity indeed comes across as shifting and elusive, shaped by the experiences of diaspora in various corners of the world. *Pseudonym's* relationship with these Jewish languages suggests a desire to connect with a historically marginalized and persecuted minority, thus a more meaningful identity option than the dominant and mainstream English of his Canadian socialization. As discussed, English as a global language is imbued with power dynamics. With this in mind, *Pseudonym's* emotional

connection with his Jewish heritage not only illustrates how languages can function as sites of kinship and support for an oppressed culture but also alludes to the language hegemonies of majority English-speaking contexts. As shown, the elaborate notion of linguistic identity is inextricably linked with language-related belief systems and power relations in increasingly intricate ways in the postmodern world (Jenkins 2007: 198).

Despite spending only five months in Israel and speaking both Hebrew and Yiddish at an intermediate level, *Pseudonym's* sentimental connection with this linguistic and cultural world is nonetheless solid, which again illustrates the power of affect over competence. As Pérez Firmat (2003: 4) aptly notes, tongue ties are founded on emotional bond rather than language proficiency, thus privileging affinity over fluency. Although Hebrew holds symbolic value to *Pseudonym*, he still feels at home in Canada, which underscores the multiplicities and complexities of human allegiances and adherences, of being able to belong and identify with different subject positions in a globalized world.

While English is more or less intimately woven into polyglot trajectories, it seems to principally matter to the respondents due to its undeniable global importance. As linguist Anna Mauranen (2017: 7) points out, the spread of English across the world is not only beyond compare but the number of its non-native speakers surmounts that of its native ones. English has indeed become a "global default lingua franca" of transnational interactions, a shared contact language between individuals with different native tongues (ibid.). The advantages that it offers are thus considerable even though polyglots tend to have a much broader range of linguistic resources to make use of in international encounters.

The value of English is linked with personal, educational, and professional opportunities in the globalized world. Slovenian *Barbara*, for instance, links English with career possibilities along with universal connectivity. As linguist Barbara Seidlhofer (2011: 4) notes, English gained its prevalent status with the help of heightened movement and advancements in media technologies. Besides travel and online communication, Slovak *Any* and Spanish *Helen* experience the benefits of English skills more concretely and profoundly while living in Australia and the United Kingdom, respectively. While English is naturally also used to communicate with its native speakers, the notion of lingua franca is useful. Seidlhofer (ibid.: 61) even calls for a distinction between English as a native language and as a lingua franca, for communicative proficiency in English as a lingua franca should no longer be assessed against

the standard of native-speaker English in light of the worldwide spread of the language. This perspective legitimizes non-natives as rightful speakers of English, thus also validating their identity narratives. *Rakesh Ratul* from Bangladesh sheds light on his relationship with the language that he has been using for more than twenty years:

> I use English almost all day long for reading and writing, and at least half the amount for speaking. When talking in English I feel like I can use the logical side of my brain better than my first language. (Rakesh Ratul, S2.)

This quotation alludes to English-language education and media common in Bangladesh, which arguably have their roots in the British colonization of the country. Moreover, the frequent and versatile use of the universal language along with the logical connotations attached to it rather than to his native Bangla echo the linguistic imperialism discussed earlier. Drawing on Galtung's work, Phillipson (1992: 52–54) considers different forms of imperialism through a separation of the globe into the Centre ("the powerful western countries and interests") and Peripheries ("the underdeveloped countries"), both of which have centers of greater influence dominating and taking advantage of the less privileged. This control over Peripheries is enabled by the transmission of Centre languages together with the norms, values, and practices that entail them (ibid.). Fluency in English indeed indicates privilege in Bangladesh (Piller 2016: 198). Moreover, cultural imperialism encompasses entangling subcategories specific to media, science, and education through which institutions as well as educational and professional principles are disseminated (Phillipson 1992: 65). Bangladesh can be considered one of numerous countries that English linguistically and culturally pervades.

These broader power dynamics provide a backdrop for *Rakesh Ratul's* relationship with the language even though it was not the sole medium of instruction on his education path. His study materials in university were in English, however, which also has parallels with a host of countries worldwide where the lingua franca increasingly permeates academic spheres. As the leading language of scientific publications and communication (e.g. Meneghini & Packer 2007: 112–113), English can indeed be considered a vehicle of intellectual ideas in today's academic landscape. Furthermore, it is commonly advocated as the sole lingua franca able to "serve modern purposes", a conception that emphasizes its superior expediency for essentially everything important (Phillipson 1992: 42).

This purported suitability of the language for both oral and written self-expression is discernible in *Rakesh Ratul's* analytical depiction of English, which differs from the more

adventurous and romantic associations he attaches to French and Hindi, respectively. While the expression "logical side of my brain" surely mirrors his personal experiences of a preferred instrument of communication in certain situations, it nevertheless carries associations with reason and progress traditionally representative of Western science. Moreover, the perceived connection between English and logically formulated thoughts can be viewed simply as an indication of the lingua franca's pervasiveness within the academia, online media, and so forth. Indeed, his presumed ease with English reflects linguistic imperialism that rationalizes and naturalizes its usage. The omnipresence of English can also elicit negative responses in fervent language learners, as illustrated by Vietnamese *Vincentius*, who has lived in the United States for five years:

> …I don't even like English at all. I use it only because others do… I would like to move to a different country where English is not this important… I still stay here just because some of my relatives live here. (Vincentius, S2.)

While *Vincentius'* background in Classical Studies and interest in Esperanto indicate broader linguistic and cultural curiosities unattainable through mere English, his resentment towards the language also seems to echo language attitudes prevalent in the United States. Although the country has no clear official language policy, languages considered a menace to English have historically been eradicated as a consequence of implicit assimilationist thinking (Macedo et al. 2003: 23–24). Ideological monolingualism indeed privileges English over other languages in the United States, which also creates difficulties for addressing linguistic variety in educational contexts (Reagan 2005: 52). The above-described sentiment contextualizes *Vincentius'* irritation with inescapable English, who comes across as a language enthusiast of foreign origin defying the monolingual norms of his country of residence.

When having to live in a second language, the majority of people experience a need to reshape their sense of self (Baran 2017: 291). Making use of Pavlenko and Lantolf's work, Baran explains how relocation to a new linguistic and cultural setting following childhood leads to some type of loss along with a recreation of language identity (ibid.: 320). *Vincentius*, who grew up in Vietnam and refers to Vietnamese as his identity, may thus experience English as an artificial or cerebral language compared with his more vivid linguistic and cultural beginnings. What is more, the respondent may conflate the dominant language with identities positioning him in unsatisfactory ways. Experiences of othering in this so-called melting pot can indeed engender ambivalent linguistic ties, as earlier examined. Furthermore, Pavlenko and Lantolf accentuate agency and purpose in an immigrant's or expatriate's "linguistic border

crossings", success in which necessitates restructuring of one's life histories in compliance with the customs and social interactions of their novel environment (ibid.: 320, citation original). Some people are not keen on refashioning such self-narratives in a second language and in keeping with new cultural codes, uninterested in attaining near native fluency or cultural assimilation (ibid.). Although well-integrated *Vincentius* studies and works in the United States with a high proficiency in English, he seems disinclined to adhere to this adopted country due to the aforementioned grievances that English appears to represent to him.

This negative reaction to a particular language is unusual amongst perspectives typically showing love for languages. As mentioned earlier, polyglots' language attitudes are underpinned by emotions, which can be understood as relational phenomena. *Vincentius'* emotional response to English reflects his consciousness of its hegemony on a global scale. Broader social and historical understandings can thus influence the informants' perceptions of their respective languages. Notwithstanding the controversy related to the use of English, this lingua franca can also be viewed in positive terms for more intimate reasons. This sentiment is encapsulated by Italian *Will P.,* who seems to find comfort in the language:

> I have an emotional attachment to English in particular, because I think I am more free from other people's influences when using it and it gives me more tools than my own first language. It's been my first second language and it holds a special place in my heart, even when it's not as accurate or as natural as I'd want it to be. Then, it's the most neutral language I know, the only one where I don't have to gender myself with pronouns, names, adjectives, verbs (!) that don't reflect who I am as a non-binary person. (Will P., S1.)

Thus, English can also be considered a "neutral language" due to fewer gendered structures than what this respondent is used to. Gender identity can be understood as performative in the form of repetitive acts (Butler 1988: 519–520), which can be constituted through language. In sociolinguistics, language has long been considered a way to express one's identity to others (Cameron & Kulick 2003: 11). This sociality of identities can be complicated by a gender binary embedded in various languages positioning some individuals in unsatisfying ways. In research on gender and sexuality, this dichotomy has been treated as a principle sign of the "marginalization and stigmatization of non-normative subjects and practices" (Zimman, Davis & Raclaw 2014: 1–2). In recent decades, however, dualities such as man and woman have been called into question in various disciplines (ibid.).

Even though English is by no means devoid of gendered structures such as gendered pronouns, it generally does not have feminine or masculine for nouns as found in the respondent's native Italian. For such reasons, *Will P.* finds the linguistic structure of English liberating despite implied inadequacies in language proficiency. This vantage point offers a refreshing outlook on the lingua franca as an empowering linguistic resource. Through languages, people are able to fashion novel identities and oppose unwanted ones assigned to them by others (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 27), which illuminates *Will P.'s* fondness for English as a more permissive medium for self-expression. This emotional connection also epitomizes the previously examined freedom granted by a second language, for a new linguistic system offers this informant "more tools" for self-expression. English can thus provide a creative escape from the confines of one's first language, allowing for a more coherent identity narrative more in line with one's sense of self. Although gender is a salient and fruitful subject position from a linguistic viewpoint, it is hardly touched upon in the responses.

Similarly to first languages, second languages can evoke little emotional response in the informants. Although Canadian *Bom* enjoys and wishes to continue learning and practicing her second languages, she does not attribute this to sentimental value. With a background in linguistics, her interest in languages comes across as an intellectual activity pursued in more or less academic contexts. Overall, the degree of intimacy attached to languages is dependent upon how firmly they are woven into the fabric of one's life. The absence of emotional connection can partly be explained by formal contexts in which the languages are acquired. As touched on earlier, foreign languages learned in classroom settings tend to be less embodied. Such languages may thus remain distant, perhaps disconnected from faraway countries where they are spoken, thus lacking a proper cultural component. In addition, one may have a superficial proficiency in these foreign tongues. The languages can be less vested with emotions because they are not used and fostered in relationships, which indicates that they are also likely to be freer from emotional baggage, which allows for a more cerebral and intellectual approach towards learning them.

As discussed, several respondents are primarily intrigued by languages themselves, fixed upon their lexical, grammatical, and phonetical features. While *Zuz* is drawn to a "sound system" and *Adrianac* to a "new structure of thinking", *Maroula* seeks to understand how people "communicate in different codes" and *A nationality confused German* to "recognize patterns".

Furthermore, this linguistic allure is occasionally directed at a specific sound or writing system, which points to language learning as a comprehensive activity for multiple senses. For instance, Belgian *Kat* is fascinated with Japanese and Georgian in both spoken and written form. Erard (2012: 262) refers to "neurological rewards of learning" when describing language gatherers' linguistic motivations and pleasures. Although these linguistic pursuits are less tied to close relationships imbued with emotion, they also come across as emotion-laden as a gratifying pastime. Engagement in linguistic systems can indeed count as a stimulating escapade.

Second languages are also regarded as resources whereby one can realize their personal, educational, and professional aspirations. This instrumental value given to language skills is demonstrated by Dutch *Noëlle*, whose second languages are important in enabling her to interact with others. This includes English, which allows her to study certain topics. Both perspectives exhibit utilitarian reasoning, which often seems to overlap with dispassionate stances towards languages. Some informants indeed come across as detached and analytical when describing their linguistic investments. This impersonal outlook is encapsulated in Polish *Andrzej's* succinct words:

> I don't have any emotional feelings to second languages. I just like to talk with people. Language is only a tool. (Andrzej, S2.)

Language can thus be viewed as an apparatus for interactional purposes. In addition to reflecting *Andrzej's* extroverted traits, this significance attached to communication can also be linked with the great number of over twenty languages he has knowledge of, for polyglots with broad linguistic repertoires are unlikely to be emotionally invested in each of them. Indeed, having a multitude of languages at one's disposal suggests not only partial understanding of their linguistic properties but also superficial relationships with several of them with regard to emotional resonance. In accordance with this, Russian-Canadian *Iouri* denies fostering strong emotional ties to all of his languages due to having so many. Thus, polyglotism involving a high quantity of languages can be indicative of linguistic disconnections.

As the above-described examples suggest, linguistic attachments and detachments can enclose a traditional distinction between emotionality and rationality. As anthropologist Catherine Lutz (2007: 19–22) points out, emotion as such can be considered a principal Western cultural classification involving ideologies regarding gender and ethnicity. These power hierarchies are visible in the emotion-thought dichotomy, also perceived as the contrast between mind and body, head and heart as well as rationality and irrationality (ibid.). This dual approach is not

fruitful in the framework of avid language learners, however, whose engagements are nuanced and intricate. Although various benefits of language acquisition occasionally seem to trump sentiment, emotions cannot be thoroughly divorced from supposedly reasonable stances towards language learning, for polyglots' preferences, inclinations, and rationalizations perpetually intermingle. Thus, sentimental and instrumental as well as intrinsic and extrinsic values frequently overlap in polyglot lives, and it is often problematic to separate utility from pleasure especially in the context of an intellectually stimulating leisure pursuit. This remains true also in the area of relationships, which I will now proceed to examine through interactional language usage.

3.3 Relationships and communication

Language can be viewed as a cornerstone of communication in a myriad of relationships and social interactions. Communication in itself is a human, universal, and social process of transmitting and exchanging messages including information, ideas, and emotions between a sender and a receiver (Rayudu 2010: 7–8). Language, in particular, constitutes a bond between people as a medium of communication (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1986: 13). Moreover, language constitutes an immensely intricate system permeating connections with other languages in multilingual interactions (House & Rehbein 2004: 1–2). On a global scale, multilingual communication has become pervasive due to growing migration patterns as well as technological developments (ibid.). This is also illustrative of avid language learners. In what follows, I will explore the role of first and second language in a variety of polyglots' relationships primarily within the private sphere. The particularities of the respondents' friendships, partnerships, and parenting will thus be addressed.

As discussed, languages are learned and maintained in more or less social encounters often with communicative aspirations in mind. Thus, language acquisition is never a purely individualistic and solitary endeavor but requires sufficient input and output of the kind found in social interactions. In my data, England-based French *Trezoq* illuminates his language learning trajectories:

> German was the second language I learned as a child and is linked to childhood memories. English is my family's first language, so it is hugely important. Dutch is a language I used when I became financially independent, so it is part an important stage in my life. All other languages have been, to a certain extent, opportunities to meet people who counted in my life. (Trezoq, S2.)

As shown here, linguistic attachments are profoundly social. *Trezoq*'s depiction serves to illustrate how language ties in with youthful images, time spent with family as well as pivotal life circumstances, all reflecting interactions with other people. As previously examined, identities are both social and narrative, involving temporal and spatial aspects in connection with social relations. What is more, relationships typically intensify linguistic bonds. In fact, words of a second language can become affective and embodied through private relationships such as family and romantic ties (Pavlenko 2005: 214, 236). I will later return to these themes.

Unsurprisingly, polyglots tend to value the possibility to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds thanks to language skills. As an illustration, *Anna* enjoys being able to converse with Spanish speakers in Tennessee, regularly acting as a volunteer English-Spanish interpreter at various events. Knowledge of Spanish has thus provided her with a community otherwise inaccessible to her both personally and professionally. Furthermore, she indicates her progress in American Sign Language:

> I have several friends who are Deaf. We always communicate in ASL. I need to improve my finger spelling, but I can understand it and be understood. I interpret a church service every other week from English into ASL. (Anna, S2.)

Understanding of a sign language has similarly enriched her life by expanding her possibilities to communicate with people. Sign languages consist of visually rather than auditorily discerned movements of hands, fingers, and arms (Crasborn 2012: 4). They have come to be treated as "full, complex, independent human languages" within sign linguistics (Pfau, Steinbach & Woll 2012: 1). While signing was previously widely mistaken for mere globally understood gestures, the multitude of distinct sign languages used by deaf people across the globe is now broadly recognized (Woll, Sutton-Spence & Elton 2001: 8–9). For instance, *Lou* mentions using Auslan (Australian Sign Language) besides English daily with her children due to their hearing losses, thus widening a traditional conception of language as a system of sounds. For the purposes of this study, languages articulated through body movement are a worthy point of interest equal to spoken languages.

Various respondents report either having studied a sign language or express their interest in learning one. Dutch *Noëlle*, for example, is fascinated by Dutch sign language. These informants' motivations presumably stem from curiosity towards systems of processing and conveying information, reasons representative of a host of polyglots. Mere intrigue with manual alphabets without a social component attached to it could indeed underlie this relative

popularity of sign languages amongst the participants. The fact that sign languages are of interest to polyglots also suggests that the Deaf community has been somewhat successful in promoting itself as a linguistic minority. Although sign languages have been acknowledged as "full languages" in several nations, progress remains to be made across much of the world in this area (Bell 2014: 5). What is more, eagerness to acquaint oneself with a sign language without former contact with it can be interpreted as willingness to bridge gaps between different social groups, people with and without hearing loss. This topic of intermediation will be examined in Chapter 4 from the perspective of cultural brokering.

Polyglots are often engaged in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural friendships. Mexican *Kaixa* provides a vivid portrayal of this interplay from the perspective of affective styles discussed earlier. He claims his Korean friends to be more open and thus authentic when speaking their first language, which points to the deeper embodiment of mother tongue. First languages can indeed be assigned meanings related to authenticity, creativity, expressiveness, and humor, as previously unraveled. *Kaixa* writes enthusiastically about his native Spanish, a language that not only enables him to express emotions more openly but in his view renders even its non-native speakers warmer. The change in their behavior allegedly leads to a more honest and relaxed atmosphere through speech that is casual rather than formal. He explains this transformation by a shared "latin [sic] code of communication".

In popular discourse, people from Latin America have often been represented as emotional and passionate, which has contributed to national and cultural stereotypes. While these perceptions are generalizations, *Kaixa's* depiction alludes to outspoken and straightforward demeanor, which presumably also involves non-spoken self-expression. Nonverbal communication consists of a variety of visible signals such as facial, hand, and other bodily gestures in addition to touching and distance between individuals (Hall & Knapp 2013: 6). Tone, pace, and volume, in turn, are illustrative of hearable nonverbal cues (ibid.) Physical presence thus intersects with linguistic delivery, giving the impression of a more or less liberated social conduct. These bodily expressions and unspoken cues merit noting even when examining linguistic facets of communication. The above-described expressiveness is not restricted to native Spanish speakers, however. In connection with their first languages, multilingual individuals may refer to more animated speaking styles including gestures such as the use of hands (Burck 2005: 93–94).

Kaixa nonetheless portrays his first language particularly vividly. Pérez Firmat (2003: 10–11) is aware of the clichés associated with Spanish as the language of soul or love, also referring to it as "florid" and "ornate". Although these characterizations are more used to depict written Spanish, they seem to tie in with *Kaixa's* perception of emotionality within the language. Moreover, he attempts to apply the "passion-feeling accent" that he has in Spanish to other languages, which also suggests confidence and pride in one's language and culture. Thus, *Kaixa's* first language emotionality appears to influence his affective performance in second languages even though he also states feeling shyer when voicing his opinions in Japanese. German *Mohn und Gedächtnis* seems to corroborate *Kaixa's* conceptions of a more open mentality enabled by Spanish. With a Mexican partner and most of her friends Latino, she feels the most loved in Latin America:

> …Spanish is very much a matter of the heart to me because of all the wonderful people it enables me to speak with, learning Spanish has brought more love into my life than I ever had before. (Mohn und Gedächtnis, S2.)

Her affinity with Spanish appears to intertwine with meaningful relationships formed with ease, which points to the accepting and empowering role that the language has played in her life. In fact, people may wish to fashion more free-spirited and emotional identities through fresh affective styles provided by a particular language (Pavlenko 2005: 209). *Mohn und Gedächtnis* certainly seems to foster affectionate ties with Spanish whereby she presumably has created more liberated identities, a viewpoint that brings forth the emancipatory aspect of language learning. Furthermore, a particular language can become more affective through falling in love, as illustrated by Serbian *Ela*:

> Greek, well, when I started learning it, I somehow felt connected with it. I also fell in love with a Greek at some point in my life, so I became even more motivated to learn it and I began to love it even more since then. (Ela, S2.)

This portrayal reveals a linguistic bond deepened by a romantic and/or sexual encounter. While romantic and sexual yearnings beneath linguistic loyalties are well-recognized in literary studies, the intertwinements between language and desire have largely been disregarded in research on bilingualism and second language acquisition (Pavlenko 2005: 211). Applied linguist Ingrid Piller (2002: 269–270) introduces the notion of language desire to depict an individual's zeal for a specific language or several. According to her (ibid.), romantic and sexual desire can interweave with a wish for a new linguistic self. Even though *Ela*'s infatuation with Greek precedes her love interest and she does not disclose changes in her identity narrative, her relationship with the language certainly seems laden with affection. Her case

serves to illustrate that amorous experiences can not only intensify linguistic ties but increase motivation to learn a language. Similarly, Greek *Alex* mentions being in love as the greatest motivation for language acquisition, which can naturally have a positive effect on learning results as well.

Despite the above-described intermingling of language and love, language choice does not always elicit significant emotional responses in private relationships. When asked about the language used with a potential partner, American *Andrew* shares his insight on overall communication in a relationship:

> Well, to be honest, I've never thought about this. I did date a Chinese woman in Beijing, and we communicated sort of 65/35 in English/Chinese respectively. But I think we all know that in those kinds of ultra-personal relationships, a lot of communication is done without the use of any language at all. So really, it's whatever language comes to mind. (Andrew, S2.)

This sexual, and arguably masculine, approach relies heavily on nonverbal communication, largely disregarding the question of language choice. Although *Andrew* does not deny the significance of language for a functioning relationship as such, language choice does not seem to play a pivotal role in an intimate relationship based on his experience. However, linguistic choices adhere to power balance in a host of relationships, as a native speaker of a given language can be considered to hold the advantage over the other. Furthermore, allusions to sexual encounters highlight the role of nonverbal communication particularly in intimate interactions. As gestural and linguistic messages tend to intertwine and cooperate to express sense (Hall & Knapp 2013: 6), communication ought to be understood broadly also in language learners' social interactions.

Piller (2002: 265–266) approaches bilingual and cross-cultural partnership as a performance wherein hybridity and multiculturalism are mostly celebrated. In the same spirit, several respondents seem to embrace cross-linguistic and often cross-cultural relationships, which can manifest itself in creative linguistic performances. While *Pimenthée* from Brussels mentions communicating with her partner in five languages, Polish *Jowita* uses four with hers "both for fun and practice", which points to an all-encompassing polyglot lifestyle. Numerous couples indeed seem to not only take pleasure in multilingual coexistence but also to seek opportunities to enhance their language skills with the help of one another, also in cases where neither of them is a native speaker of a given language. In fact, Indonesian *Menma* wishes to help her partner improve his or her target language skills and expects equal support in return, which

further shows the comprehensive nature of diligent language learning and thus continuous self-improvement.

As described above, communication between polyglot couples often involves code-switching. Typical of bilingualism, code-switching refers to the ways in which people shift between two languages (e.g. Mondada 2007: 297; Bell 2014: 113). As linguists Tej K. Bhatia and William C. Ritchie (2013: 388–389) note, despite often being linked with language deficiency by prescriptivists, language-switching and mixing can be seen as intricate, imaginative and innovative practices. Polyglots certainly seem to employ their linguistic resources in creative ways. As an illustration, *Anna* regularly engages in code-switching with her boyfriend, alternating between English and Spanish sometimes in the middle of a conversation. They thus speak both of their first languages when together but adapt to the dominant language when in a group. Multiple factors including interlocutors, topic of conversation as well as time and place of communication influence bilinguals' language choices (ibid.: 378). Italian *Taylor* further illuminates the role of language in relationship dynamics:

> My girlfriend is Lithuanian, we share English, Russian and Italian. We switch between them continuously. Generally we choose which one according to the situation, Russian, for example, is excellent to have a private conversation in public without whispering. (Taylor, S2.)

Code-switching seems to be a salient facet of their interpersonal communication, presumably propelled by a desire to practice one's language skills with a like-minded language enthusiast. As a "socially meaningful" activity (Bell 2014: 113–114), language-switching can have a practical function in specific situations. Switching to Russian is indeed motivated by a wish for privacy in the assumed absence of others able to understand them, which underlines the context-dependent nature of language alternation. More specifically, language choice can be determined by communicational aims, language emotionality, the speaker's and interlocutor's proficiency as well as their first language and the conditions in which their other languages were acquired (Pavlenko 2005: 141). Furthermore, some multilingual speakers prefer their first or second language when expressing their emotions while others reject rigid linguistic confines and engross in "creative language play" by mixing affective elements of several languages (ibid.). This understanding aptly characterizes the intricacies embedded in individual polyglots' language choices.

Furthermore, people socially position themselves vis-à-vis each other through language, multilinguals through several of them (Bailey 2007: 341–342). According to Heller (1988: 10), code-switching pertains to linguistic means through which various social identities are negotiated. Other linguistic and social resources for this purpose can include code-mixing, second language acquisition, and the adoption of new linguistic forms as well as the formation of novel identity narratives (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 22–23). Polyglots may thus socially reposition themselves through their partner's or friend's language or the variety of languages their intercommunication is carried out in, perhaps hoping to reinvent themselves afresh. Furthermore, the ease in which several respondents seem to engage in joyful language play in the form of language-switching suggests an absence of considerable struggle in resisting unsavory identities assigned to them by others.

That said, status associated with a particular language can also determine the medium whereby multilingual people opt to communicate with others (Pavlenko 2005: 141). As Bailey (2007: 363) argues, identities constructed through multilingual speech are worth examining not because of any linguistic features but in their social, historical, and political contexts. Put differently, language ideologies undergird polyglots' choice of language or speech variety. Switching between a dialect and a standard language can be as deserving of examination as alternating between distinct languages from the perspective of social identity (ibid.: 357). As discussed previously, Slovak *Maroula's* habit of speaking a dialect with her husband and a standard language in public provides an example of linguistic decision-making impacted by surrounding power hierarchies legitimizing a certain speech variety in addition to interactional purposes and more emotional motivations. Polyglots' incentives are thus complex and multifaceted.

Even amongst polyglots drawn to linguistic diversity, English seems to be a relatively common choice of language amongst interlingual couples. When asked about the language of communication with a potential partner with whom they do not share the same language, many have opted or would opt for a language they both know, unsurprisingly the widespread lingua franca. Polish *Leafar*, for instance, mentions English as a presumable alternative in case he does not have sufficient knowledge of his potential partner's first language. However, its extensive usage is also considered distasteful amongst the respondents, a lazy option reflecting prevalent power structures. Some indeed mention using English only in the beginning out of necessity. Italian *Shotby*, in turn, calls it "the last option", preferring to use the language that

he has lower proficiency in, which demonstrates the underlying desire for self-development characteristic of polyglotism. Furthermore, Russian *Albireo* describes his potential partner from the standpoint of their shared language of communication:

> … if he is a progressive person, it's Esperanto, if he isn't smart enough – English. (Albireo, S1.)

However exaggerated, this response contrasts progressiveness with simplicity, revealing belittling conceptions about English as a mundane choice for communication. This lingua franca indeed comes across as an effortless and overused option compared to a more particular and exclusive Esperanto. As touched on earlier, several informants mention this international auxiliary language in their linguistic repertoires or aspirations. Given its intended easiness and certain impartiality as a created bridge language (Edwards 2013: 11), it is no wonder that Esperanto is of interest to multiple polyglots seeking to broaden their horizons. More broadly, Esperantists form a rich transnational network with events and publications in this constructed language (Reagan 2005: 80), which speaks to its liveliness as a phenomenon. The particularities of this so-called language of peace will be further discussed in Chapter 4 from the viewpoint of intercultural mediation. In the framework of relationships, however, Esperanto appears to have brought joy into several of the respondents' lives. German *Porko*, who found love at an Esperanto convention, refers to the auxiliary language as "neural [sic] ground", which reflects its position as virtually nobody's first language. *André M.* also mentions his emotional attachment to Esperanto, which he spoke with his girlfriend for five years. Their cases illustrate the vitality of the constructed language in bringing language lovers together.

To expand the concept of partnership to a broader family, the question of potential childrearing gives further insight into polyglots' values, and it is by no means a wonder that avid language learners predominantly valorize linguistic diversity also in their parenting methods. Piller (2002: 245) discusses "private language planning" as a deliberate choice by couples to embark on the venture of bilingual parenting, an idea which entices several informants as well. Language transmission commonly takes place in the privacy of the home or in the public sphere through education (Extra 2009: 175). The combination of these approaches is presented by French *Cécile*, who is married to a Czech, lives in Prague and has a "completely bilingual" daughter who first attended Czech primary school and then French secondary school. Unsurprisingly, the respondents' language planning strategies reflect their own linguistic backgrounds and thus presumably tongue ties.

Similarly to Piller's (2002: 255) findings, polyglots' language choices vis-à-vis parenting are underpinned by economic, emotional, and cultural motivations. American *Yossel* notes that "they should know yheir [sic] roots", presumably referring to his ancestors' linguistic and cultural legacy that his future children should have an understanding of. Language indeed constitutes a vehicle of culture whereby children establish and maintain a connection with their heritage. As French *Trezoq* puts it, "I speak my language, my partner hers, and they are exposed to the country's language", which also alludes to the importance of preserving minority languages in a dominant-language environment. The decision to continue to pass a language on to one's children when they attend school in a dominant language relies heavily on the significance that this language holds to the cultural identity of the parents or the minority group that they are part of (Extra 2007: 175). The importance of minority language identity becomes particularly pronounced in the case of *Jordi* from Catalonia. Having lived in several places around Europe before moving to the United States, he describes his first language as follows:

> I don't have children right now but I plan to speak in Catalan to them. Regardless of how many languages I speak, Catalan is the closest to me. I want my children to have that heritage (and what comes with Catalan being a minoritised language). By default I guess being Catalan is being multilingual. Even if I raised my children in Catalonia and my partner was a Catalan speaker they would acquire also Spanish and English at least. (Jordi, S1.)

Jordi portrays Catalan as an emotionally significant minority language worthy of preservation and passing on. Catalan culture was repressed especially during Franco's dictatorship, which had an impact on the language at an institutional level (Strubell 2011: 130–131). Against this backdrop, *Jordi's* commitment to Catalan constitutes a political statement in addition to affective appreciations. He also links Catalan identity with linguistic diversity, which accentuates how speakers of lesser used and valued languages are expected to negotiate their identities in response to hegemonic language ideologies. Historical power imbalances thus underpin *Jordi's* polyglot outlook on life, which he along many other respondents wishes to pass on to his offspring.

The benefits of a multilingual and multicultural upbringing can also be considered from the perspective of intercultural understanding. Indeed, contact with various languages and cultures from childhood can help increase children's cross-cultural awareness. While Taiwanese *Chang* supports "early exposure to languages, new cultures, and people of different nationalities", Italian *Zahra* makes the point of children not being afraid of others as a result of a multilingual upbringing. These examples demonstrate that multilingual practices from childhood are

expected to bring about tolerance, acceptance, and solidarity. I will return to this topic of cultural brokering in the final chapter.

Early exposure to languages can also be viewed by parents as a "small investment with a high return" given the benefits followed by native fluency later in life (Piller 2002: 252–253). In a similar vein, the informants typically approach childhood multilingualism as a farsighted investment in personal and professional development. For instance, *Zahra* also wishes to facilitate her future children's educational and occupational trajectories, which speaks to the goal-oriented facet of language acquisition. Indeed, the instrumental value embedded in polyglot practices ties in with economic capital that language skills can later translate into. Japan-based *Reka TF* of Hungarian and Australian nationality is also adamant about raising her potential children multilingually due to the advantages that language skills have granted her. The purposefulness of polyglot parenting is also illustrated by American *Mr. Montgomery*, who refuses to let his potential children watch television or movies in English in order to maximize exposure to another language that he himself plans to regularly speak with them. Meanwhile, Tunisian *Yaz* brings up the topic of supplementary language courses, thus placing emphasis also on formal education. Contrarily to most respondents, German *Laprasman* does not wish to impose his hobby on his offspring, stating that his children learn their local language first. Thus, polyglot practices can also remain a personal passion.

As shown, language plays a central role in polyglots' social relationships with respect to friendships, partnerships and parenting. Various social interactions indeed illustrate how linguistic selves are shaped through language play in the form of code-switching, which ties in with polyglot pleasures. More broadly, polyglots' emotional attachments to their respective languages come across as highly varied and multifaceted, ranging from infatuation to indifference. While I have already explored these language learners' linguistic bonds, practices, and identities in a variety of sociocultural contexts, a more global perspective is needed to unearth their relationship to the world at large.

4 Polyglots' global perspectives

4.1 Transnational belongings

Adult language acquisition is a process that is frequently, yet not unequivocally linked with a global mindset. As political scientist David Held (2010: 29) aptly formulates, globalization encompasses the "widening, intensifying, speeding up and growing impact of worldwide interconnectedness". Through such cross-national processes, people can disregard or surmount the confines of a particular region along with its past, now in some way part of an infinite and interrelated world (Bashir & Phillip 2015: xi). Global influences can be thought to destabilize traditional ways of life, urging us to revise our common conceptions of cultural identity (Hall 2003: 86, 88). Local identities indeed seem to give way to transnational leanings in the case of contemporary polyglots. In contrast to the entitlements and obligations accompanied by national citizenships, global bonds are cultivated through optional involvement in cross-national activities (Schattle 2007: 67). Polyglots learning languages willingly certainly transcend national and cultural boundaries in various ways. This chapter delves into the respondents' more or less universal inclinations, particularly cosmopolitan values with regard to home and belonging. Towards the end, I will also illuminate counterarguments for a global lifestyle, namely reluctance and inability to travel the world due to a host of socio-economic priorities and constraints.

It is appropriate to consider polyglots' transnational leanings through a cosmopolitan lens. Widely used within the political as well as academic realm, the concept of cosmopolitanism can signify and be utilized in various and often conflicting ways (e.g. Braidotti, Blaagaard & Hanafin 2013: 1–2). According to sociologist Gerard Delanty (2009: 68), cosmopolitanism encompasses an active interplay between the global and the local by combining "the universal order of the cosmos and the human order of the polis". With roots in ancient Greek and a lengthy history, the term is commonly understood as a person's allegiance to the global community (ibid.: 20, 54). Following political philosopher Jeremy Waldron (2006: 83), cosmopolitanism can further signify a love of humanity, or universal obligations irrespective of nationality or ethnicity. While the term can also refer to universal norms, laws, and practices (ibid.), I approach cosmopolitanism as a global orientation whereby a polyglot's viewpoint is not tied to their country of origin but involves an understanding of oneself as part of a universal entity.

Similarly to Sobanski's (2016: 166–167) study on polyglot selves, the respondents' linguistic curiosity and skills prompt them to relate to the globe as a whole. Canadian *Dh*, who works in South Korea, indeed views himself as "part of a bigger, global, conversation" by virtue of his language skills. Having resided in various countries, American *Yossel* similarly considers himself cosmopolitan due to the "multiple selves" that his linguistic repertoire has endowed him with. Nigerian *Zeke*, to whom "everywhere is home", also underlines the value of humanity over local connections such as "tribes". These informants' self-identifications thus seem to interweave with global processes. Although universal belongings do not automatically exclude local attachments, a large number of the respondents reject or downplay patriotic sentiments, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the world instead. Brazilian *Mary* reports being "from the world", Turkish *Destina* feels an affinity with "the whole world" and Greek *Alex* sees herself as a "world citizen not much attached to my country".

The above-mentioned informants' reactions clearly evoke global citizenship. As stated by political scientist Hans Schattle (2008: 1–4, 7), this multidimensional concept to a large extent mirrors cosmopolitan ideas even though it draws on rivaling approaches. Despite the frequent disregard for global citizenship in favor of nation-states in the academic and political arena, internationally inclined individuals and groups celebrate its principles worldwide. Individuals may initially be drawn to global citizenship for a host of reasons, including a particularly diverse upbringing, cross-border travel, experiences of studying or working abroad, professional development, images of different countries, or civic or political involvement. (Ibid.) The respondents do not refer to political engagements, which speaks to the fact that their curiosities are first and foremost language-related. However, the other above-mentioned practices, experiences, and aspirations seem to coincide with polyglots' transnational inclinations. Throughout this chapter, I will provide examples of respondents who are globally oriented in different ways.

Besides transnational likings, the respondents occasionally express some frustration with the countries most familiar to them. While *Alex* denies notable ties to her native Greece, Italian-German *Ally* states belonging everywhere apart from her native Italy. Although the underlying reasons for some participants' dissatisfaction remain ambiguous, they may adhere to social, political and cultural factors. In effect, negative associations with one's country of origin or residence may prompt polyglots to reject national identities or patriotic thought, potentially

propelling them to seek comfort or inspiration in cosmopolitan ideas. Disappointment in national politics, for instance, may galvanize transnational sentiment.

Overall, fervent language learners' inclinations and disinclinations constitute a multifaceted matter underpinned by contradictory stances and entangled affections, as the following cases disclose. With pride in his home country, *BG* also alludes to "a lot of stuff to [sic] that needs to get better" in his native Chile while also subscribing to a cosmopolitan sentiment. Despite fond and somewhat patriotic ties to Bangladesh, *Rakesh Ratul*, in turn, claims to hate a multitude of things about his country while simultaneously denying cosmopolitan leanings due to inadequate knowledge of the cultures and traditions attached to his target languages. Spanish *Helen*, who prides herself on her home country's cuisine and landscapes but not politics, also takes more interest in language learning than cosmopolitan ideas. These examples elucidate the versatility of polyglots' appreciations in different geographical locations likely tackling sociopolitical challenges.

Polyglots' sentiments of belonging and further identities are shaped in the midst of universal interrelatedness. Following distinguished geographer and social scientist Doreen Massey (2008: 17–18), the time-space compression depicts the increased movement of money, people, goods, and information, which can also elicit experiences of fragmentation and dispersion in individuals. Although polyglots tend to celebrate linguistic and cultural exchanges, this issue of destabilization deserves consideration. Through travel, marketing, and consumer culture as well as media representations and systems, globalization has provided us with a wide range of identities to choose from (Hall 1999: 62). Consequently, we have become more detached from specific places, customs and histories through this "cultural homogenization" (ibid.). Globalization can thus be regarded as a menace to cultures and cultural identity, engendering fragmentation and scatteredness (Hall 2003: 86). Polyglots' often broad and multiple belongings comply with this dispersion even though or precisely because they characteristically embrace and benefit from linguistic and cultural versatility. As an example of weak national bonds, *Klaudia M. B.* with a double citizenship rejects the idea of belonging somewhere, for she states only feeling like a human being as opposed to fostering Italian, Polish, or European allegiances. Such a mindset not only privileges global ideals over local ties but also suggests cultural hybridity characteristic of avid language learners.

Cosmopolitanism can indicate the "hybridity, fluidity, intermingling, and interdependence of peoples, cultures and practices" (Benhabib 2006: 175). These wide and complex intertwinements are embedded in polyglots' transnational belongings, whose depictions of home include ambiguous and often contradictory expressions such as "everywhere" and "nowhere". Having resided in several countries, Catalan *Jordi* subscribes to both of these notions simultaneously, feeling at home in Catalonia as well as in every other place he has lived in. His affinities are thus manifold, transcending national borders. Belonging is viewed as fluid and temporary in postmodern thought (Delanty 2009: 145), which seems to resonate especially with highly mobile respondents. Although she has not traveled much, American *Anna* however claims to feel at home everywhere without actually belonging anywhere, ambivalence suggesting both elasticity and detachment from social interactions, as discussed in Chapter 2 through the lens of hybridity. Adaptability and alienation are indeed illustrative of the contemporary world imbued with fragmentation. Such split and mixed identities can be conflated with cosmopolitanism (Waldron 2006: 83).

Polyglots tend to forge hybrid identities through their linguistic pursuits. When engaging in cross-linguistic practices, ardent language learners typically seek to widen their outlook on the world. Thus, polyglots' feelings of belonging are inclined to be transnational given the cross-cultural nature of language acquisition. Through perpetual exposure to languages and cultures, polyglots can foster a connection with distant places as well as rewrite their cosmopolitan identity narratives, possibly becoming estranged from what they perceive as local. However, not all respondents experience an affinity with the whole wide world notwithstanding their language skills. Canadian *Bom*, who grew up speaking Korean and English in addition to engaging in other linguistic interests, describes her knowledge of languages:

> … It helps me feel connected to the world, but it doesn't necessarily make me feel cosmopolitan. I think it's mostly because I haven't physically been in many different countries and cultures. Learning languages help me understand cultures, but my lack of any direct experience limits my sense of feeling cosmopolitan. (Bom, S2.)

Although language skills can make the world feel more tangible, cosmopolitan identities are more likely to be cultivated through more or less frequent transnational mobility. Linguistic and cultural exposure through cross-border movement indeed seems to more effectively heighten one's awareness and connection to the world than languages pursued in academic settings. Furthermore, *Bom* attaches more importance to loved ones than to a specific geographic or cultural region when depicting her feelings of belonging. Indeed, the respondents

often feel at home when surrounded by those closest to them, whether locally or transnationally. Tight relationships thus have value beyond linguistic, cultural, and geographic boundaries. While French *Cécile* conflates home with her daughter, Italian *Zahra* feels at home with her significant other, speaking either her own dialect or the language of her partner, which adduces the role of language varieties in private belongings. Furthermore, German *Batman's* "heart is partly set upon languages", and she "would enjoy being surrounded by as many as possible". This gives weight to languages themselves even though she is also socially bound to her spouse. Human contact is similarly present in the following response by American *Andrew*:

> "Home" is where your friends are. I belong with good company, good conversation and good books. (Andrew, S1.)

Besides the value of meaningful social interactions, he also gives prominence to literature as an indicator of home, a mindset corroborated by *Batman* who juxtaposes books with family. While literature seems to be of great interest to both of them as an activity to embark on, books as concrete objects also denote a materialistic dimension potentially relevant to sentiments of belonging. In the context of a household, books can indeed evoke a conception of space associated with home. Added to that, reading in general can adhere to escapism and thus belonging, to feeling at home through imagination. Engagement in literary worlds can also conflate with cross-cultural understanding and thus bridge-building, as will be illuminated in the following chapter.

In view of social belongings, it is fruitful to consider the notion of cosmopolitanism from the perspective of fantasy. Following the reasoning of Peng Cheah, social anthropologist Henrietta Moore claims a cosmopolitan outlook to be attainable through imagination rather than perception, as we are unable to see humanity in its entirety (2013: 101). In fact, cosmopolitanism constitutes a "world-making project" among various (ibid.: 108–109). Imagination thus plays an integral role not only in the awakening or intensification of global sentiments but also in the creative and often playful process of language learning. In terms of multilingual meaning-making, the fantasies of cosmopolitanism have a bearing on many polyglots' cross-cultural adherences and thus identity negotiations. However intensive a polyglot's transnational exposure, each new language entails a new world to unveil. This vehement immersion in a language is likely to be partially prompted by internalized images of a specific linguistic or cultural region, as discussed previously from the viewpoint of envisaged target language communities.

These cross-national leanings are exemplified by Italian *Larka*, who fosters a profound connection with Finland, a country she has visited twice. Nevertheless, she claims to have never felt more at home and "in the right place" through all her life. Even though she does not elaborate on its linguistic aspect, this inexplicable affinity with a particular nation illustrates how different cultures can seem palpable to individuals across borders, often precisely through imagination cultivated by access to various forms of media. Initially vague ideas of faraway ways of living can also translate into lived experience, and numerous respondents have indeed relocated abroad. Furthermore, several respondents report not (yet) having found a place to call home. *Shotby* provides an example of this sentiment:

> I don't feel like Italy owns me. I'm young and still looking for what I'm going to call "home". (Shotby, S1.)

This absence of an experience of belonging can indeed be partly explained by youth accompanied by a desire to explore the world, a wanderlust sparked and facilitated by global flows. On the whole, however, age does not seem to play a crucial role in the transnational leanings of avid language learners. In fact, their aspirations and longings seem to transcend national confines in all age groups, which also points to the cross-generational character of linguistic passions.

Polyglots' often-mobile narratives intersect with the concept of space, which manifests itself in various ways throughout the survey. As stated by Massey (2008: 58), space is socially produced by simultaneous interrelations across local and global levels. Perpetually reconfiguring itself, space is firmly intertwined with the multiplicity of trajectories and cannot be separated from identity formations (Massey 2005: 9–10). Tunisian *Yaz*, who currently lives in Greece and uses Tunisian Arabic, French, and English on a regular basis, considers the Mediterranean his home, thus expanding the concept of home beyond borders, nation states and fixed places. Rather than identifying with a specific community, *Yaz* seems to opt for a wider space and assume a broader worldview aligned with cosmopolitan ideals. The proximity to pivotal countries and possibly languages evokes a sense of belonging in him, for "anywhere I go I wouldn't feel alienated" in this region. One's linguistic and cultural landscapes may also overlap with actual sceneries, for the reality of a maritime view suggests fondness for familiar nature and climate, which may interweave with tongue ties, as language and memory are intimately joined. This further illustrates how time and space are inextricably linked (Massey 2008: 51).

Yaz's inclination towards a broader space elucidates not only the general arbitrariness of borders but also their possible fruitlessness for self-identification in the case of vehement language learners. As geographer Anssi Paasi (2002: 158–159) notes, borders can be considered expressions of societal power relations with the ability to both include and exclude. As results of former conflicts, borders often overlook linguistic and cultural diversity, which polyglots characteristically thrive upon. *Will P.* does not believe in borders, for "languages and cultures are not to be isolated by lines on maps". This disregard for national confines is reflective of cosmopolitan sentiment common amongst the informants. Cosmopolitanism can indeed signify the "fluidity and evanescence of culture", embracing the dissolution of cultural borders (Waldron 2006: 83). While various types of border-crossings seem to be a reality to many of the respondents, freedom of mobility is not obtainable to everyone, as will be elaborated on later.

As shown, various responses portray home as a value-laden concept more or less interwoven with global processes. Morley (2001: 425) is acquainted with the shifting perceptions of home, place, identity, and belonging, laying emphasis on the "transnational patterns of communication and mobility" that mark the current disrupted world. In view of this, polyglots' conceptions of belonging frequently intertwine with global flows vis-à-vis physical movement in the form of travel or migration, multilingual and multicultural practices engaged in locally as well as the convenience of media technologies, all of which encompass some kind of desire to connect with other people. Next, I will shed light on these different dimensions of cross-cultural belonging, of which those respondents who have relocated abroad serve as the most apparent examples. German *NorthernLass*, who has come to foster an indescribable connection with Scotland, illuminates her feelings of belonging in the light of Brexit:

> ... I am European, born in Germany, at home in Scotland, but a citizen of the world. (NorthernLass, S2.)

The communities that she relates to certainly come across as multiple and shifting, which underscores the flexibility of identities examined earlier. Hybridity is indeed characteristic of spatial identities in the midst of different types of border-crossings (Paasi 2001: 25). Additionally, Brexit seems to have consolidated *NorthernLass'* identity narrative, heightening the sentimental value of her languages. As her case elucidates, readiness to revise, adjust, and expand the groups that one belongs to can nurture a sense of global citizenship (Schattle 2008: 7).

Transnational leanings do not necessitate physical movement across borders, however. *Pimenthée* of three nationalities from Brussels states belonging where there are "enough international people speaking various languages", feeling particularly at ease in big cities with a multicultural community yet presumably able to adapt to a variety of places. Her view echoes those of several other respondents, who allude to the value of a multilingual environment over actually emigrating abroad. These informants may interact with speakers of their target languages regularly in their cities or countries of residence, which renders traveling unnecessary for language acquisition. Globalization, which can be viewed through the continuity between local and global (Held 2010: 28), finds its way into local communities where internationally inclined polyglots often exhibit cosmopolitan characteristics. This transnational sentiment is supported by Switzerland-based *Evathefirst* of Russian and Ukrainian nationality:

> …I feel cosmopolitan. With my friends around the world borders do not exist, only distances. (Evathefirst, S2.)

The allure of cosmopolitan ideals and a certain disregard for borders may thus partly overlap with meaningful relationships spread across the world. Moreover, her response alludes to the ambiguity of borders often obscured by effortless communication via social media. In fact, nowadays individuals not only travel and relocate more and more for various reasons but also transcend boundaries through the internet (Paasi 2001: 25). On the local scale, the modern conception of home can be seen as "phantasmagoric", as faraway occurrences enter individuals' households through different communication technologies (Morley 2001: 428, citation original). The boundaries between local and global indeed become enmeshed, as transnational and multilingual flows permeate polyglots' private sphere. As the foregoing examples illustrate, spaces of belonging can be experienced locally, nationally, or transnationally, from the domestic household to broader geographic levels (ibid.: 425–426).

As touched on above, polyglots' transnational leanings develop and intensify also through digital interconnectivity. Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (2004: 3, 22) is known for the concept of the network society, which encompasses electronically mediated communication systems with global reach. Closely intertwined with timeless time, his notion of the space of flows consists of streams of information circulating between places through digital networks, which allows for an experience of the simultaneity of events and practices even in distant regions (ibid.: 36–37). These worldwide patterns of communication tie in with polyglots' more or less cosmopolitan sentiments, which are arguably amplified by a sense of instant

interrelatedness, particularly via the internet. Associated with speed and ease, cyberspace in some sense renders the world more tangible. In the responses, the salience of networks comes through in the importance attached to online connectivity, at times even over transnational mobility. Such as *Evathefirst* mentions the internet as a substitute for foreign travel**,** *Yossel* is content with staying put, for the "Internet is enough". These stances speak for a polyglot lifestyle valorizing virtual reality where national boundaries are perpetually and effortlessly surpassed.

A desire to widen one's cultural perspectives can propel a person to embrace global citizenship (Schattle 2008: 7), an identification stimulated by exposure and use of various means of communication. As pointed out, cosmopolitanism can be regarded as a "world-making project" facilitated by present-day media such as YouTube (Moore 2013: 101). Through multilingual content available on the internet, polyglots the world over are able to enlarge their understanding of global issues by transcending the confines of their local communities. While American *Kiki* likes to "check out the coverage on big news stories in several languages", Malaysian *SN* refers to his "a bit more complete" perspective when consuming media in multiple languages. These views link cosmopolitanism with a grasp of world affairs. Awareness of universal interrelatedness can indeed be considered a core component of global citizenship (Schattle 2008: 26, 44). Gathering information from multilingual sources can also allow for a more critical outlook on news coverage, as examined in Chapter 2 from the standpoint of educational capital. Moreover, foreign media consumption can enhance one's understanding of different cultures, as will be explored in the following chapter.

Facilitated by universal forms of communication, interaction between people with a common pastime and thus the development of shared sign systems has become increasingly feasible regardless of geographical distance (Hall 2003: 91). In fact, social media enables cross-national, cross-cultural, and cross-linguistic interactions between people from around the world, of which polyglot-related Facebook groups serve as examples. Most respondents share at least a membership of these communities, presumably appreciative of a platform whereby to interact and share content with like-minded people. For instance, Italian *Zahra* brings up the convenience of Facebook in connecting with fellow polyglots living far away. In addition, avid language learners may attend polyglot events in different parts of the world, which can also broaden their international horizons.

It can be argued that fervent language learners engaging in virtual border-crossings form a subculture of their own, which can also be seen as an imagined community joined together by individuals with a shared passion despite for the most part not knowing each other. Affiliation with this envisioned multilingual and multicultural community can contribute to polyglots' transnational belongings. What is more, the respondents negotiate their identities also via electronic means of communication. In fact, Block (2007: 194–196) calls for more research on the influence of communication technologies on the formation of second language identities. The internet undoubtedly permeates various areas of polyglots' lives, thus shaping their self-narratives and worldviews.

While cross-linguistic exchanges seem to flourish in virtual reality, physical border-crossings are also in vogue amongst polyglots. The bulk of the informants indeed take pleasure in exploring the world through travel, work or studies insofar as possible. For those able and willing to travel, linguistic resources certainly render the world more accessible. They coincide with independence, providing individuals with freedom (Sobanski 2016: 168). As an illustration, French-German *Amids* is able to "move freely in lots of countries without the need for an interpreter or a travel guide", which suggests a link between language skills and cosmopolitan self-confidence. Language skills indeed impact multilinguals' "sense of comfort" in diverse corners of the earth (ibid.: 166). Serbian *Ela* and Brazilian *Tamy Weller* adduce their heightened sense of security while traveling abroad by virtue of their linguistic repertoires, which further invokes a connection between safety and global belongings. These examples serve to illustrate not only the benefits of linguistic competences but also their positive impact on the respondents' self-reliance in cross-cultural interactions.

While the vast majority of the respondents enjoy traveling or living abroad, not all polyglots identify as adventurous globetrotters. Czech *Fancy Poncho*, for instance, finds herself too lazy to travel due to the distress caused by the activity. While some informants lack travel interests, others find it challenging to pursue a mobile lifestyle for a variety of reasons. In line with Massey's (2008: 21) notion of power geometry, some individuals and social groups have more control over their movement than others, thus benefiting from the time-space compression. As geographer Päivi Kymäläinen (2006: 204, 208) states, the ideas of free mobility and a borderless world are indeed challenged by social, economic, political, and cultural factors that restrain people's mobility. In accordance with this, the responses show various elements hindering the informants' cross-national movement, particularly concretely in cases where

one's possibility to reside in a country is restricted. *Iouri* of Russian and Canadian nationality, who was born in the Soviet Union and has since lived in multiple countries, wishes to live in the European Union, but constantly has "problems with permits", which underlines mobility-related disparities amongst people.

The informants' freedom to move echoes their social conditions more broadly, as touched upon in Chapter 2 with respect to Bourdieu's different forms of capital. While numerous respondents do comply with being well-educated and well-travelled, several also refer to financial constraints. Class is indeed a significant distinguishing factor amongst others when it comes to movement (Morley 2001: 428). Although eager to travel outside Australia for the first time, *The bee guy* invokes his lack of finances, referring to "no income and a wife who cannot travel" in addition to being a "responsible family man". Furthermore, Bangladeshi *Rakesh Ratul* would wish for "certainty of a particular lifestyle" if moving abroad, which suggests socioeconomic concerns. While much celebration has been around concepts of "mobility, fluidity and hybridity" in the field of cultural studies, Morley (2001: 427) notes the uneven access that people have to cultural capital wherewith they are able to reshape their identities.

Several respondents also mention other commitments such as work, studies and children that prevent them from traveling or relocating abroad. Young respondents such as Canadian *Bom* particularly point to their studies as well as lack of money and time when disclosing restrictions on their travel aspirations. German *Porko* also refers to ecological consciousness as a partial reason for limited travel. Characteristic of younger generations, concern about the climate may indeed diminish travel desires also amongst internationally oriented language learners. Be their border-crossings physical or virtual, polyglots are inevitably enmeshed in global processes, thus also exposed to the Other in varying degrees. The following chapter illuminates polyglots' encounters with different cultures with an emphasis on understanding and intermediation.

4.2 Cultural brokering and bridge-building

Associated with extensive language skills and curiosity about the world, polyglots can be thought of as bridge-builders in cross-cultural interactions. Given their linguistic awareness and competences, avid language learners are also likely to exhibit sensitivity when communicating with people from different cultures. These cross-cultural encounters can be viewed as "self-other relations", for images of the self are tightly and unavoidably interwoven

with fantasies of alterity (Moore 2013: 102–103). Facing the Other thus also poses questions about the self, as polyglots (re)position themselves in relation to the social world. In what follows, I will delve into the respondents' open-mindedness and willingness to overcome linguistic barriers through various forms of cultural brokering. Around the globe, linguistic diversity presents interactional challenges that can be met with translation and vehicular languages (Edwards 2013: 5). The question of language choice will also be addressed through the lens of power relations.

As previously explored, multiple respondents of this study foster a global mindset concerned with universal interdependence. Cosmopolitanism indeed encloses an ethical understanding of quintessential equality of all people independent of their origin (Held 2013: 29–30), which connotes tolerance and solidarity for cultural as well as linguistic diversity. Although recreational language learning is also propelled by various other earlier discussed reasons, ideals of shared humanity do seem to undergird several polyglots' interest in foreign tongues. In my material, American *Andrew* even links linguistic aspirations with love of humanity, for his love of people underlies his desire to learn languages. Concerned with global citizenship and justice, Luis Cabrera (2010: 14) states that people rather than nations, states, or other communities are "morally primary" from a cosmopolitan perspective. This gives prominence to human beings in the global community.

Linguistic variety, which polyglots characteristically find enriching, constitutes an integral dimension of a multicultural mosaic. Delanty (2009: 132–133) envisages multiculturalism from a cosmopolitan standpoint, emphasizing the significance of intercultural dialogue between different social groups. A large number of the respondents indeed give weight to intercultural understanding facilitated by language skills. While American *Yossel* is able to experience "the spectrum of humanity" through languages, German *NorthernLass* views language learning as a comprehensive process that "opens your eyes, ears and heart to other cultures". Furthermore, Polish *Jowita* conflates monolingualism with restrained cultural understandings, stating that "you are forced to live within the narrow confines of your own culture's mindset" as a monolingual. The foregoing perspectives speak to the value of cultural diversity the world over.

In an increasingly globalized world, the need for cross-cultural understanding is evident, particularly with respect to combatting racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. With this in

mind, the study of intercultural communication often clearly seeks to resolve cultural clashes, work towards universal peace, and enhance people's intercultural competence (Piller 2017: 194–195). The latter does not consist of a variety of trainable and evaluable skills devoid of context but is founded on dedication to "public service and the common good" and is thus inextricable from values (ibid.: 201–202). Through this intercultural mediation, a novel shared culture that benefits everyone can be invented (ibid.). People particularly suited to engage in cultural brokering are those with extensive linguistic resources at their disposal. In other words, polyglots have the potential to act as intercultural communicators in enhancing understanding and tolerance across different linguistic communities.

In Sobanski's (2016: 167–168) study on a polyglot identity, multilingual and ethical practices intertwine in a bid for inclusivity. This willingness to facilitate communication between distinct language groups by assuming the part of a translator (ibid.) also resonates with the respondents' awareness of the importance of such intermediation. Illustrative of this bridge-building mentality, Brazilian *Tamy Weller* views language learning as "one of the many ways we can break barriers between people from different countries and cultures". Moreover, German *Porko* emphasizes the value of communicating with monolingual people less exposed to other cultures, which obliges one to make an effort to understand their traditions and value systems. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 121–122) speaks of "metacultural and metalinguistic awareness" as a facet of cultural competence, thus recognition and consideration of differences between cultures. The enhancement of this aptitude is dependent upon encounters with the Other (ibid.). Compassion for the disadvantaged is illustrated by Canadian *Dh*, who claims to be "more tolerant of differences in speaking and communicating styles and more patient with people who are trying to communicate" following his own experiences of clumsy self-expression in Korean.

From the viewpoint of empathy, global citizenship can indicate readiness to foster relationships and interactions with people from different cultures, involvement that necessitates curiosity and sensitivity (Schattle 2008: 47–49, 53). Particularly the informants with broad-ranging language skills, wealth of international experience, and willingness to reach out to people come across as chameleons in transnational interactions, presumably interpreting for others and thus engaging in cultural brokering. While numerous respondents disclose multilingual and multicultural study and work environments, the reality of cultural intermediation is particularly pronounced in the professional choices of *Jowita*:

> I work as a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Syria, largely due to my knowledge of Arabic. (Jowita, S1.)

She provides the most striking example of how language skills can be harnessed for the betterment of humanity in contexts of conflict resolution. Providing humanitarian aid to those in need certainly ties in with the ideals of promoting peace and prosperity across cultures. What is more, *Porko* mentions using Russian when volunteering in a refugee clinic, thus employing language skills to help the underprivileged. As these examples suggest, how one confronts linguistic, national, ethnic, or religious diversity can align with global citizenship from a cross-cultural standpoint (Schattle 2008: 47–48, 65).

Furthermore, polyglots acquire information about the world in various languages in written and audio-visual form, through fiction as well as non-fiction. For instance, avid language learners tend to expand their cultural horizons through foreign media consumption, as previously examined. *Tamy Weller* mentions that being able to "make researches [sic] about specific culture-related topics in many languages" has enlarged her understanding of other cultures. Furthermore, Polish *Kabel* is motivated by foreign literature and cinema in his language learning endeavors. Naturally, a broader range of linguistic resources also provides access to a wider array of art and entertainment to explore. Language skills have indeed given German *Batman* access to a variety of literature, thus "more viewpoints". Engagement in literary texts from different countries in their original languages can surely broaden one's perspectives.

Immersion in literature, in particular, can prompt people to identify with characters with a different view. Having researched narrative empathy, Suzanne Keen (2007: 99) claims that empathy is appreciated and sought out by the majority of readers interested in fiction. Although there remains insufficient proof to suggest that fiction actually elicits empathy in readers and thereby leads to altruistic behavior towards real people, numerous professionals within the cultural domain maintain a firm and widespread belief in the interconnection of reading stories and social or ethical advantages (ibid.). Literary adventures can certainly increase polyglots' knowledge of different cultures, possibly rendering the Other more relatable. Reading can thus adhere to intercultural bridge-building. Also, by favoring original texts rather than translations one gets to experience the more or less untranslatable nuances of a given language more or less interwoven with culture.

However, some informants are less interested in enlarged intercultural understanding, cherishing languages primarily for their linguistic features. German *André M.*, for instance, views culture as "secondary or tertiary" after language skills. No language can be divorced from cultural practices, however. As structural entities, languages can be thought to comprise linguistic elements fruitful to the understanding of historical and cultural mindsets. Indeed, even rudimentary knowledge of foreign languages can give insight into different ways in which communities and societies have come to be shaped worldwide. Reflecting on her native Korean, Canadian *Bom* illuminates the bond between grammatical functions and social hierarchies:

> I think language and culture reflect each other and have a very intricate relationship, and this has allowed me to understand where someone is coming from. For example, the use of honorifics/formal speech in Korean is, I believe, reflected also within the society. It affects, shapes, and structures how relationships are fostered between people, and creates different senses of hierarchy or respect from slight changes to the syntax. This characteristic of the language helps me understand why such hierarchical relationships are built and maintained. (Bom, S2.)

Her description touches on the integral role of language in forming social relations, as the use of honorific speech in Korean is closely linked with age and social status, thus adhering to power structures. This respect for elderly people characteristic of Korean culture is a fundamental virtue of filial piety, stemming from Confucian principles. The deep-rooted link between language and culture also becomes evident in the following response by American *Kiki*:

> … One of the most interesting is the deep understanding people have of the spatial metaphors that are inherent in languages. For example, as an English speaker, sadness is downward. These spatial analogies form a sort of underlying (there's another one!) structure to a language. (Kiki, S2.)

These types of spatial conceptions embedded in linguistic structures surely give insight into our comprehension of the world as speakers of different languages. The extent to which language forms our worldviews is well investigated across disciplines (Sobanski 2016: 163). The theory whereby "language influences or determines thought" is referred to as the Whorf hypothesis (e.g. Seuren 2013: 29; Pérez Firmat 2003:12). Linguist John McWhorter (2014: 150) criticizes this thinking, arguing that "language structure does not correlate meaningfully with culture". While language does not create thought per se, language undoubtedly mirrors culture in the form of elements such as honorifics and spatial concepts (ibid.: 27–28). More than the subtleties of linguistic relativity expressed in the responses, what matters here is the complex relationship between culture and language, which both *Kiki* and *Bom* are conscious

of. Awareness of such intertwinements allows for a more nuanced and versatile view of the world.

As touched on earlier, cultures can be understood as sign systems that humans make sense of through language (Hall 2003: 87–88). By the same token, language does not take place in the abstract, for it is used by people for various reasons in various spatio-temporal contexts (Bell 2014: 131). As language both forges and is forged by the "situation of its usage" (ibid.), it is a salient point of interest when seeking insights into people's social and cultural practices. Moreover, all language learning resources encompass semantic dimensions beyond pure form, which ensures that language acquisition can never be disentangled from cultural influences. Language can also be firmly interwoven with one's sense of self, as discussed. In the words of French *Cécile*, "languages are a window into the soul of the people", which not only reveals the intimate linkage between language and identity but also the depth of cultural embeddedness and thus the potential of polyglotism for deeper intercultural conversation.

Schattle (2008: 32, 44) views global citizenship also through the lens of responsibility, which involves ethical choices and considerations regarding worldwide matters. Closely linked with the ethos of universal solidarity (ibid.: 37), this moral thought can underpin polyglots' linguistic pursuits with respect to questionable language policies, for instance. Engagement in a given language can indeed be viewed as a sign of respect for oppressed linguistic and cultural groups. In fact, several dominant-language speakers of their home countries are drawn to endangered languages out of solidarity. As an illustration, Australian *Lou* and Canadian *DTEssence* express their interest in learning an indigenous language spoken in their respective countries. Brazilian *Tamy Weller*, meanwhile, fosters an interest in a distant language:

> I intend to pursue my studies in Greenlandic because it fascinates me how such a small amount of Eskimo people manage to keep their language alive despite decades of European domination. (Tamy Weller, S2.)

Her curiosity towards the struggles of the Greenlandic Inuits under Danish rule seems to stem from both linguistic and humanitarian reasons. Besides a fascination with other ways of living, keenness to acquaint oneself with a vulnerable language can be informed by the crisis facing biolinguistic diversity. In effect, the decay of linguistic variety worldwide reflects the plight of cultural diversity akin to that of biological diversity (Muehlmann 2007: 16). Skutnabb-Kangas (2000: 69), a decades-long advocator of linguistic human rights, point out that language deaths have never occurred at a greater rate in the history of the world. She (ibid.: xxxi) even applies

the charged metaphor of "linguistic genocide" when highlighting how languages are "pushed into not being spoken". This decline of linguistic richness is not lost on many of the respondents aware of the power relations between dominant and subjugated linguistic groups. Conscious of such disparities, American *Andrew* elaborates on the languages he would like to learn:

> Cherokee, Alaskan Yup'ik, Swahili, Cantonese. Cherokee & Yup'ik because, at some point in every American's life, he/she must become aware of the terrible hand which has been dealt to the indigenous population. Seeing as I love languages and linguistics, learning an American Indian language seems like the least I can do as a demonstration of solidarity… (Andrew, S1.)

Andrew's language goals seem to be driven by compassion as well as historical and geopolitical understandings. The act of learning an indigenous language is portrayed as a responsible and respectful deed in the light of the nation's troubling history. He indeed expresses solidarity towards minority languages as well as marginalized ethnic and cultural groups, mindful of past and present injustices in the American context. Awareness of social grievances can thus impact polyglots' linguistic engagements. Indeed, it is no wonder that linguaphiles both passionate about languages and concerned with social justice wish to contribute in some way to the conservation, revitalization, and/or promotion of linguistic variety. Language as such can be considered both a requirement and a "peaceful weapon" in the fight for global fairness (ibid.: 203), an idea that many informants seem to comply with. However, threatened languages are not exclusively studied with an altruistic idea in mind. Italian *Will P.*, who studies translation and interpretation, seems to be principally motivated by the challenge when learning lesser known languages with limited exposure and materials:

> … Irish is an experiment really, something I'm trying out just to find out how well can I learn a language I like without a teacher and without all the exposure I have always had… (Will P., S1.)

As *Will P.'s* example shows, the acquisition of this somewhat endangered Celtic language can also constitute an intellectual endeavor rather than a humanitarian act of compassion for a threatened culture. Again, polyglots' incentives are versatile. Although some informants are predominantly driven by linguistic interests coupled with a desire to challenge themselves, a receptive outlook on cultural diversity is nonetheless prevalent throughout the material.

While the historically unrivalled spread of English has been discussed throughout this study, here, I seek to illuminate its controversial status as an intercultural mediator. While Dutch *Noëlle* attaches importance to English due to its wide reach compared to her first language, German *Porko* points out that people who speak English are easier to communicate with due

to “common international ground”. While these views underline the undeniable benefits of a bridge language, it can also be considered problematic from the standpoint of cultural brokering aiming towards mutual understanding. The adequacy and suitability of English for cross-cultural understanding is questioned by *Iouri*, who mentions his reluctance to use the language in favor of others:

> … I feel that I have a broader perspective and better understanding of various countries than people who don't care less about languages and use just English. (Iouri, S1.)

This response highlights the advantages of extensive language skills and acknowledges cultures beyond this lingua franca while simultaneously taking its command for granted. In its pervasiveness, English poses a threat to linguistic equity (Reagan 2009: 153). The language has indeed come to symbolize a prime instrument of cultural intrusion through its dominance over transnational trade, online communication and film distribution, also contributing to the “Disneyfication of world cultures” (Macedo et al. 2003: 16–17). Furthermore, English linguistic imperialism tends to prosper through videos, films, music, and television (Phillipson 1992: 59), which are certainly accompanied by different forms of social media in today’s media landscape. Conscious of these hegemonic practices, *Iouri* gives more prominence to less valued languages and cultures in his unwillingness to use the lingua franca. Also, Spanish *Helen* is pleased that English is not her first language, which suggests similar appreciation for broader perspectives.

Phillipson (2009: 92–93) claims “lingua franca” to be an incorrect, misguiding, and invidious term when referring to the cultural neutrality of English. In effect, language cannot be considered neutral nor innocent, disconnected from its speakers and the culturally and historically produced meanings assigned to signs (Macedo et al. 2003: 31–32). Language is thus never a mere instrument of communication devoid of ideological dimensions. As an illustration of English language hegemonies, the survey that prompted the informants’ responses was conducted in English. The unpleasant aspects of the language further come through in the following response by Taiwanese *Asdf*, who lives in the United States:

> … I hate Anglocentralism or whatever. I hate that Americans go to other countries and expect people to speak English, but everyone speaks English when they come to America. (Asdf, S1.)

As a “lingua americana”, English indeed has immense global influence culturally, economically as well as militarily (Phillipson 2009: 92), which undergirds *Asdf’s* contempt of Americans profiting from this privilege. Anglocentricity normalizes and privileges English-

language practices over other languages, similarly to ethnocentricity whereby one considers other cultures according to the norms of their own (Phillipson 1992: 47–48). In addition, the professional practices in English language teaching disregard social, political, and economic issues linked to the usage of the language (ibid.). This standard of English is acknowledged by Australian *Jai*, who believes that "too many English speakers are arrogant when it comes to other languages and feel that English is sufficient", which speaks to its hegemonic status. What is more, the acquisition of this prevalent language can also inflict a sense of inferiority upon subjugated speakers whose language and histories are disregarded if not given up on in the process (Macedo et al. 2003: 16). Some informants are concerned about such linguistic minorities, as shown previously from the perspective of language preservation.

In the American context, Reagan (2005: 38) underscores the value of studying a second or foreign language even when this does not lead to high proficiency. Indeed, language study not only gives people an understanding of linguistic features and structures helpful in whatever language but also enables them to fathom how the world is perceived through languages. Furthermore, socio-political reasons for language learning consider the ways in which power relations are fostered through language ideologies, which many polyglots tend to be aware of especially with respect to English. Additionally, language study can aid native speakers of English to better recognize their advantage in interactions with non-native speakers. (Ibid.: 39–42.) These are all salient viewpoints from the perspective of intercultural understanding.

As English fails to provide a level playing field for native and non-native speakers (Phillipson 2009: 93), it does not unequivocally qualify as an equalizer in intercultural communication. This vehicular language is thus problematic from the perspective of cultural brokering seeking to enhance inclusivity. As Reagan (2009: 75) justly argues, we fail to better understand the diversity of humankind when relying on English as the sole medium of entry into people's views and values across the globe. This sentiment is illustrated by Australian *Lou*, who sees her native English as a "barrier to accessing conversation in other languages", presumably alluding to its ubiquity the world over. Furthermore, Mexican *Kaixa* is motivated by a desire to interact with people without English skills "in a deeper and more complex way" so that they can be heard "with all their own backgrounds and feelings". Indeed, there is value in promoting linguistic diversity precisely so that the disadvantaged can claim a voice in an English-dominated world. This mindset underscores the call for mediators in possession of varied

linguistic repertoires. Polyglots serve as examples of such intercultural agents, well-placed to defy the dominance of this global language.

The world needs to find just and efficient ways to tackle the problems of linguistic variety. The tools to ease interlingual communication are versatile, including the acquisition of Esperanto. (Reagan 2009: 152–153.) As discussed, this global auxiliary language comes with an ideological aspiration to facilitate human interaction (Reagan 2005: 78–79). The language was developed in 1887 by Polish Jewish L.L. Zamenhof, who was brought up in a "multilingual, multicultural, multinational, multireligious" environment (ibid.). Against this backdrop, it is easy to see the appeal of Esperanto in the eyes of internationally oriented language enthusiasts cherishing cross-cultural communication. Bulgaria-based Russian *Albireo* recognizes the ideological beauty of the constructed language, emphasizing its "hope for a peaceful world". Esperanto was indeed meant as a supplementary language that would put people on an equal footing, for their shared medium of communication in multilingual contexts would be nobody's mother tongue (ibid.: 79). As a language that simultaneously belongs to everyone and no one, Esperanto can indeed be considered a leveler between its non-native speakers, thus more suitable for cultural bridge-building than English with all its present and historical baggage. Indeed, the constructed language can be considered untarnished by negative backgrounds (Edwards 2013: 11).

Judging from the responses and the relative popularity of Esperanto in polyglot events worldwide, the additive language has been reasonably successful amongst fervent language learners. For polyglots, its often-discussed easiness and simple structure can seem both tempting and gratifying, and *Iouri* even recommends it for people struggling to learn foreign tongues. However, Esperanto has faced criticism and ridicule for its presumed easiness, unnaturalness and unusefulness (Reagan 2005: 77–78). On the other hand, Esperanto can also be considered problematic from the perspective of its supposed universality. As the global auxiliary language is primarily influenced by Indo-European languages coupled with some lexical loans from others (ibid.: 81, 83), it can hardly be considered a universal language representative of linguistic diversity from a structural viewpoint.

As discussed earlier, Esperanto seems to be a topic of interest to individuals vested with adequate cultural capital. In addition, the auxiliary language appears to bring joy and meaning to several of the respondents' lives, as examined from the viewpoint of relationships. It also

seems to entice individuals who long for new endeavors and perhaps a sense of community rather than a mere language of survival for practical purposes. Fascination with this supplementary language can thus stem from both linguistic intrigue and the compelling ideology behind it. According to Esperantists, the acquisition of Esperanto can, among other things, broaden its learners' outlook on the world and reduce their prejudices about other cultures (ibid.: 90–91). Given these high ideals, Esperanto is a fruitful object of investigation from the perspective of cultural brokering.

Although virtually all of my focus group regard understanding of different cultures as important to them, language skills do not automatically lead to increased cultural understanding. Some informants indeed doubt their knowledge of foreign countries and cultures notwithstanding their occasionally extensive linguistic repertoires. This mindset is demonstrated by Bangladeshi *Rakesh Ratul*, who claims to not entirely comprehend American or British culture despite having used English for more than twenty years. This experience can partly be explained by the much-discussed status of the language as a colonial lingua franca used increasingly amongst non-native speakers, who may understandably experience a cultural disconnect from Anglophone countries. American *Mr. Montgomery*, who is motivated by linguistics and dislikes traveling, also does not believe that his language skills have been helpful in providing insights into other cultures apart from certain idioms and expressions. Furthermore, Canadian *Pseudonym* questions the impact of language skills on his understanding of different cultures:

> I've always taken a big interest in other cultures (I have a bachelor's and master's in cultural anthropology), love to travel, love to befriend people from different cultural backgrounds, so it's a bit hard to separate how much cultural understanding I have derived from those parts of my life compared to how much I've derived from language skills, but I think those other factors have had the bigger impact. (Pseudonym, S2.)

This response elucidates the blurry line between language and culture in the lives of transnationally inclined individuals fashioning their lives through linguistic and cultural involvements. Having sought out cross-cultural experiences both personally and academically in addition to engaging in linguistic practices, *Pseudonym* comes across as an apparent cultural broker and bridge-builder with heightened awareness of global diversity.

As I have argued, linguistic engagements can not only intensify polyglots' transnational leanings but also enhance their understanding of cultural diversity around the world. Indeed, polyglots tend to conflate their language skills with a desire to understand other ways of living.

Eager to remove language barriers, many attach importance to cultural consciousness, often acting as mediators in intercultural contexts. The means for embracing linguistic and cultural diversity are manifold, ranging from social interactions and professional choices to media consumption and literary activities. In addition to bridging cultural divides, language acquisition can be viewed a sign of respect and solidarity for oppressed linguistic groups. Transnationally oriented polyglots versatile in languages are well-positioned to face global diversity, largely championing inclusivity and intercultural understanding. Whether these language learners link their appreciation of different cultures with cosmopolitan ideals or not, they are certainly exposed to and operate amidst global interconnectedness.

5 Polyglot passions, pursuits, and practices

In this study, I have sought to unearth how contemporary polyglots from across the globe negotiate their identities, what meanings they assign to their respective languages and how they experience the concepts of home and belonging. The data from the survey has allowed for a comprehensive approach to the multiplicities of language learners' overlapping identities also beyond particular polyglot identities. Furthermore, polyglots engage in linguistic practices within varied cultural, social, and political contexts occasionally imbued with language ideologies and power relations that can both prompt and restrain identity negotiations. Although polyglots hail from different sociocultural backgrounds with varying transnational exposure and incentives for language learning, they share a zeal for languages. Unsurprisingly, these linguistic passions and pursuits constitute an overarching theme throughout this thesis.

The narrativity of polyglot trajectories stands out from the material as a significant facet of identity construction. The survey's open-ended questions indeed drew language learning stories from the respondents, accounts that I was able to translate into identity narratives. Through these self-narratives, avid language learners make sense of their multilingual existence, creating a coherent storyline of their linguistic odyssey from childhood to adulthood. Polyglots' narratives indeed encompass temporal and spatial elements, perceptions of themselves as language learners, views on home and belonging as well as more or less affective ties to their respective languages. Polyglot paths are thus diverse and manifold, reflective of their intricate histories. These stories not only bring forth the social and interpersonal dimension of identities but also the performative quality of linguistic pursuits as a pastime based on repetition. Linguistic investments allow polyglots to reformulate their identity narratives, which accentuates the salience of human agency in identity negotiations.

Although several respondents simply delight in languages and are uninterested in any labels, polyglotism also comes across as a prestigious and elitist identity option distinguishing avid language learners from linguistically and thus culturally less informed individuals. Conflated with exceptional abilities, the title of polyglot has become increasingly praiseworthy in public discourse through media representations as well as lively online presence. Not only can linguistic resources serve as a tool to amaze others, they can also be capitalized on culturally, socially, and economically in a more or less conscious bid for a more desirable identity. Languages indeed grant their learners possibilities for "social advancement, cultural

refinement, cosmopolitanism, or simply identity change and escape from the old self" (Pavlenko 2005: 214–215). In many instances, some of these rewards at least follow, if not entice polyglots' linguistic investments.

While voluntary and intentional language learning necessitates a certain degree of cultural capital, polyglots ought not to be treated as a monolith on the basis of their socioeconomic conditions, for they are vested with varying social options vis-à-vis education, travel, and privilege in general. Furthermore, language acquisition constitutes a social practice that engages various facets of an individual's sense of self such as nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, age, and social class. Polyglot selves are thus embodiments of these multiple intersecting identity categories. Future research on polyglot identities ought to include more elaborate and nuanced investigations into gender and race with regard to linguistic engagements, subject positions that were barely touched upon in the responses in this study.

Based on the findings of the survey, traditional conceptions of an emotionally resonant first language and distant second languages do not adequately capture the complexities and ambivalences of polyglots' linguistic ties. While mother tongues can be associated with heritage, effortlessness, indifference, and even conflict, later learned languages are largely portrayed as intellectual curiosities, impersonal communication tools or self-chosen and value-laden companions on one's life path, each imbued with a different meaning. To a significant extent, polyglots write more passionately about their self-acquired languages than about their mother tongues, which underscores the fervor of this avocation. Polyglots can engage in target language communities, reimagine themselves through a second language and relish imaginative language play through code-switching. Additional languages can grant emotional detachment and thus freedom as well as elicit experiences of inauthenticity and stiffness even in polyglots purposefully and joyfully immersing themselves in distinct linguistic worlds. In addition to linguistic attachments and detachments, it would be fruitful to further examine what languages evoke negative emotions in polyglots and on what basis.

While linguistic versatility tends to play a role in polyglots' cross-linguistic and cross-cultural relationships from friendships to child-raising, language skills are also appreciated beyond evident social interactions through literary activities, for instance. Furthermore, polyglots' linguistic arcs highlight the legitimacy of tongue ties formed at a later age, thus validating second language identities that typically receive less attention than those linked to childhood

bi- or multilingualism. Recreational language learning, in particular, is a topic worthy of future inquiry given the global era we live in.

Although polyglots' experiences of belonging are varied and often contradictory, their transnational perspectives and further worldviews are certainly broadened by their linguistic repertoires. Given the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural nature of language acquisition, polyglots' sentiments of home and belonging indeed tend to transcend national boundaries with respect to physical mobility and/or communication technologies. Such global processes render the world more accessible and relatable to individuals, also sparking and facilitating polyglot passions and pursuits. While not every ardent language learner embraces cosmopolitan ideals, they are nonetheless exposed to and navigate through universal interrelatedness with a high regard for linguistic and often cultural diversity. In this spirit, polyglot selves can be viewed as more or less hybrid products of globalization, exhibiting multiple loyalties and belongings in a postmodern world characterized by fragmentation.

Transnational leanings tend to tie in with respect and solidarity for the global human community. While numerous polyglots are attuned to the decline of linguistic diversity worldwide, many also recognize the potential of their own language skills for intercultural understanding and dialogue. Multiple respondents indeed express their interest in building bridges between people from diverse backgrounds. By virtue of their linguistic repertoires, polyglots are well-positioned to act as such intercultural mediators. A willingness to engage in cultural brokering through various languages has pronounced value in a world dominated by English. Polyglot practices can thus contribute to the common good in addition to carrying elitist connotations. In effect, polyglotism can be considered both exclusive through its distinguishing prestige and inclusive in its possibility to enhance intercultural understanding in addition to being an easily accessible pastime for many, especially via the internet. These dimensions overlap and mark this multifaceted phenomenon.

As an avocation, polyglotism flourishes through transnational processes emblematic of globalization. The internet, as noted, is instrumental in inspiring and cultivating polyglot sentiment, connecting zealous language learners from across the world and possibly creating a sense of community. Polyglot identities can also be nurtured through participation in polyglot events around the globe. These particular language identities thus tend to be transnational, often intertwined with a desire to experience the linguistic and cultural mosaic of the world first-

hand. While cross-border mobility is not always feasible to everyone for a host of reasons, modern media technologies will continue to offer avid language learners linguistic stimulations to immerse in, target language communities to relate to, and identity options to choose from. Whether in virtual reality or in the physical world, linguistic and cultural flows continue to provide fertile ground for polyglot passions, pursuits, and practices.

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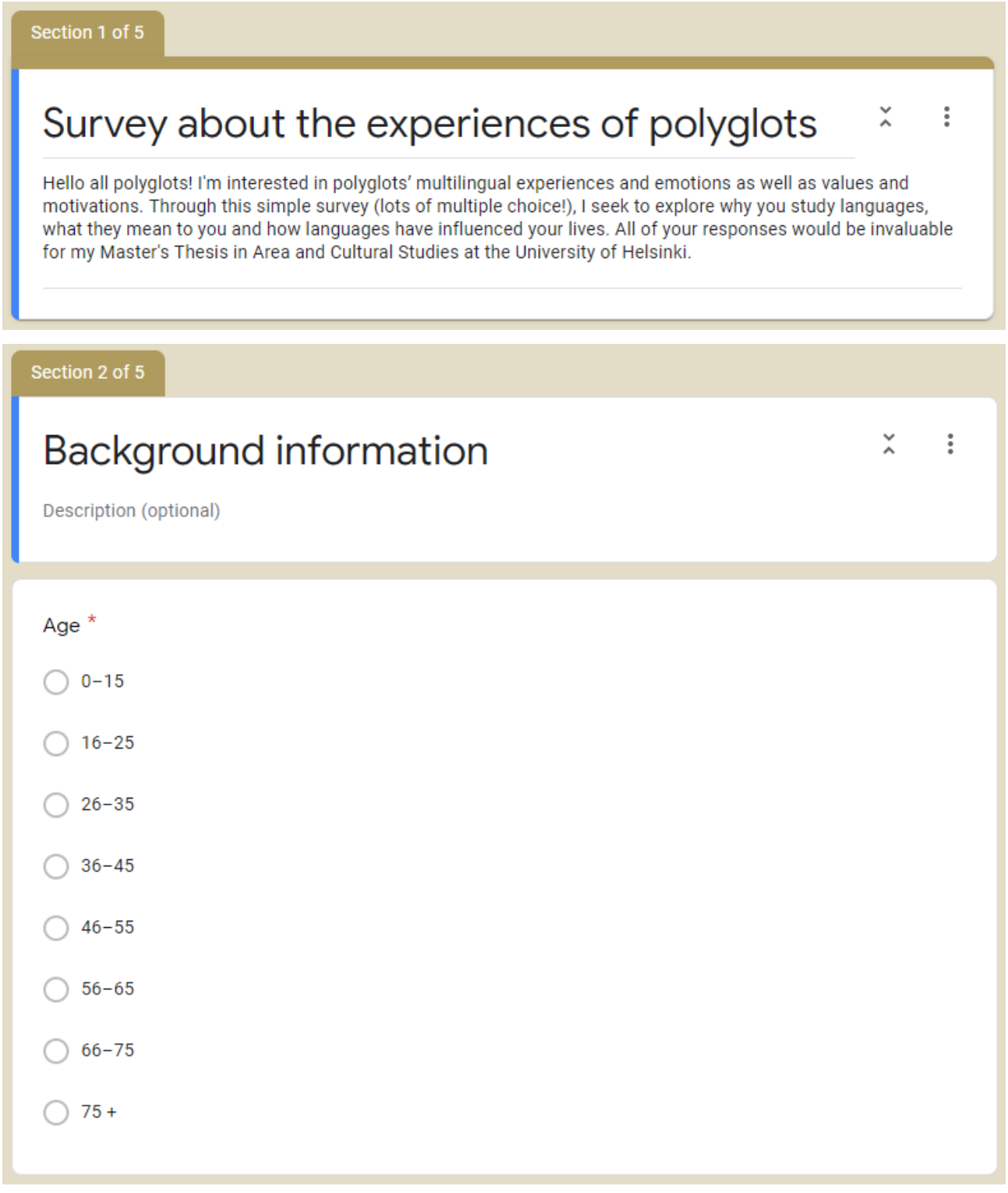
Appendix

Survey 1



Section 1 of 5

Survey about the experiences of polyglots

Hello all polyglots! I'm interested in polyglots' multilingual experiences and emotions as well as values and motivations. Through this simple survey (lots of multiple choice!), I seek to explore why you study languages, what they mean to you and how languages have influenced your lives. All of your responses would be invaluable for my Master's Thesis in Area and Cultural Studies at the University of Helsinki.

Section 2 of 5

Background information

Description (optional)

Age *

- 0–15
- 16–25
- 26–35
- 36–45
- 46–55
- 56–65
- 66–75
- 75 +

Gender *

- ○ Man
- ○ Woman
- ○ Other, or I prefer not to reply

Situation *

- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Other...

Which nationality/nationalities do you have? *

Long answer text

Where do you live at the moment? (city, country) *

Long answer text

Is your job/field of study language-related? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If your job/field of study is language-related, please specify how.

Long answer text

Section 3 of 5

Language acquisition and usage

Description (optional)

What is your early linguistic background like? Were there one or several languages spoken at home/school? *

Long answer text

Where did you grow up? In which countries have you lived and at what stage in your life? Have you always learned the local language(s)? *

Long answer text

What motivates you to study languages? *

Long answer text

What languages do you know (understand, speak, read, write) and how well? How are they present in your life? *

Long answer text

What languages would you like to learn? Why these languages? *

Long answer text

On what grounds do you choose your languages? *

- [ ] Career prospects
- [ ] Study prospects
- [ ] Communication with other people
- [ ] Better possibilities to travel
- [ ] Ability to read literature
- [ ] Family member/friend speaks a certain language
- [ ] Fascinating culture
- [ ] Beautiful language
- [ ] Linguistic interest
- [ ] Joy of learning
- [ ] Love for challenges
- [ ] Other...

In what types of situations do you use your languages? *

- [ ] Home
- [ ] Work
- [ ] Study
- [ ] Freetime
- [ ] Other...

How much time on average per week do you put into learning languages? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1 hour or less	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	10 hours or more

When in your "home country", where and how do you acquire your language skills? *

- [ ] Alone
- [ ] In interaction with other people
- [ ] At school
- [ ] At work
- [ ] On a language course
- [ ] By reading books
- [ ] Online
- [ ] Other...

If abroad, where and how do you acquire your language skills? *

- [ ] Alone
- [ ] In interaction with other people
- [ ] At school
- [ ] At work
- [ ] On a language course
- [ ] By reading books
- [ ] Online
- [ ] Through an exchange year/semester
- [ ] Through an internship
- [ ] Other...

If you have a partner with whom you do not share the same first language, what language do you use to communicate and on what basis?

Long answer text

If you have children, are you raising them in a multilingual environment? How and why?

Long answer text

Section 4 of 5

Identity and values

Description (optional)

How important is/are your first language(s) to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

What does/do your first language(s) mean to you? *

Long answer text

How important are your second languages to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

Do you have emotional attachments to your second languages? What value do they have for you? *

Long answer text

How do you define home? Where do you feel like you belong? Please specify. *

Long answer text

How important is understanding different cultures to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

When learning/maintaining a language, how important is traveling to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

When learning/maintaining a language, how important is living abroad to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

When learning/maintaining languages, do you feel the need to experience cultures first-hand, or are you mostly satisfied with acquiring language skills? If so, why is that? *

Long answer text

How have language skills affected your self-image? Are languages an important part of your identity and/or do they lift your self-confidence? How? *

Long answer text

How do you see yourself as a language learner? Do you consider yourself talented or special in some ways? *

Long answer text

How much do you value language skills in other people? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	A lot

Do you consider language skills an essential part of being an educated and well-rounded person? Please specify. *

Long answer text

Do you consider yourself a polyglot? Or a multilingual? Or something else? *

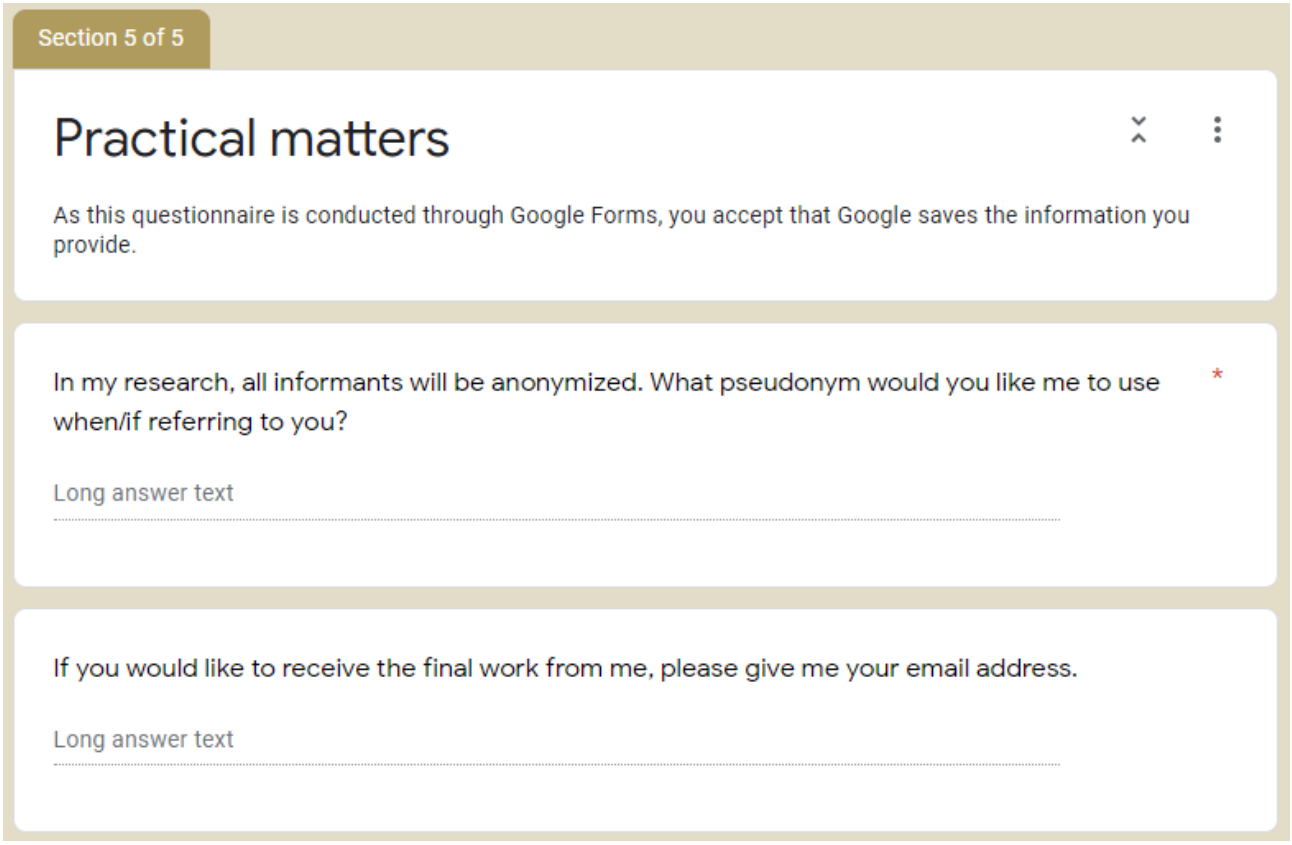
- [ ] Polyglot
- [ ] Multilingual
- [ ] Other...

How do you define the term "polyglot"? When did you start identifying as a polyglot? Or if you do not see yourself as one, why is that? *

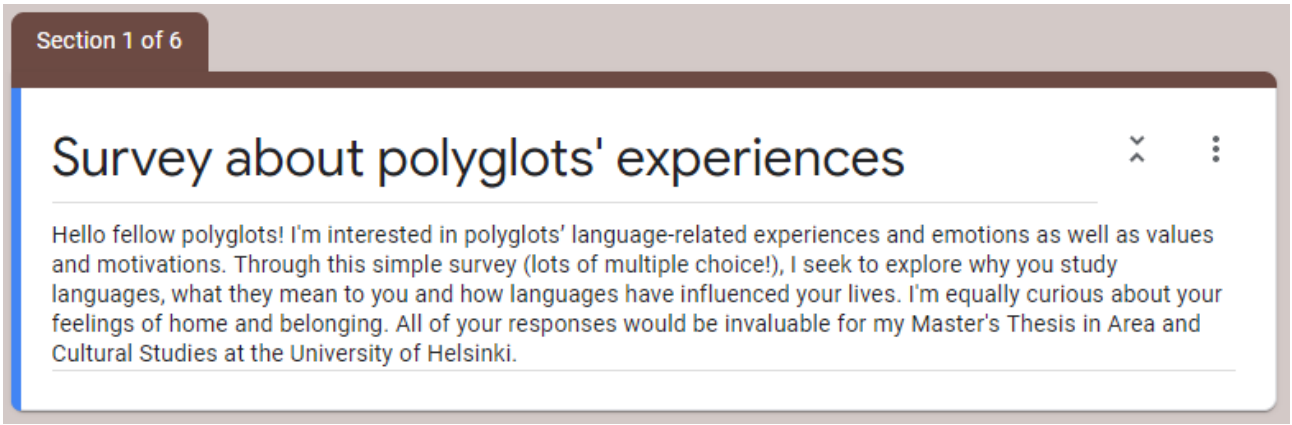
Long answer text

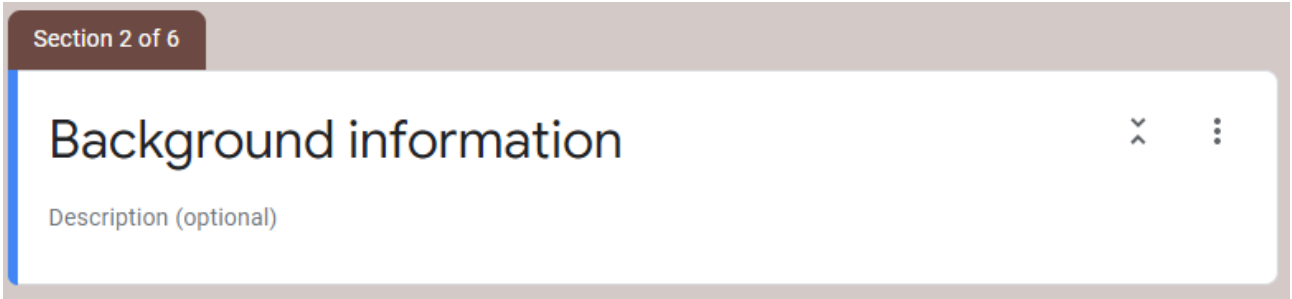
Why did you decide to join this Facebook group? *

Long answer text


Section 5 of 5
Practical matters
As this questionnaire is conducted through Google Forms, you accept that Google saves the information you provide.
In my research, all informants will be anonymized. What pseudonym would you like me to use when/if referring to you? *
Long answer text
If you would like to receive the final work from me, please give me your email address.
Long answer text

Survey 2


Section 1 of 6
Survey about polyglots' experiences
Hello fellow polyglots! I'm interested in polyglots' language-related experiences and emotions as well as values and motivations. Through this simple survey (lots of multiple choice!), I seek to explore why you study languages, what they mean to you and how languages have influenced your lives. I'm equally curious about your feelings of home and belonging. All of your responses would be invaluable for my Master's Thesis in Area and Cultural Studies at the University of Helsinki.


Section 2 of 6
Background information
Description (optional)

Age *

- ○ 0–15
- ○ 16–25
- ○ 26–35
- ○ 36–45
- ○ 46–55
- ○ 56–65
- ○ 66–75
- ○ 76 +

Gender *

- ○ Man
- ○ Woman
- ○ Other, or I prefer not to reply

Situation *

- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Other...

Which nationality/nationalities do you have? *

Long answer text

Where do you live at the moment? (city, country) *

Long answer text

Is your job/field of study language-related? *

- Yes
- No

If your job/field of study is language-related, please specify how.

Long answer text

Section 3 of 6

Language acquisition and usage

Description (optional)

Where did you grow up? *

Long answer text

Were there one or several languages spoken at home/school? Which language(s)? *

Long answer text

In which countries have you lived and at what stage in your life? Have you always learned the local language(s)? *

Long answer text

What motivates you to study languages? *

Long answer text

What languages do you know (understand, speak, read, write) and how well? How are they present in your life? *

Long answer text

What languages would you like to learn? Why these languages? *

Long answer text

On what grounds do you choose your languages? *

- [ ] Career prospects
- [ ] Study prospects
- [ ] Travel prospects
- [ ] Communication with other people
- [ ] Skills to read literature
- [ ] Family member/partner/friend speaks a certain language
- [ ] Fascinating culture
- [ ] Beautiful language
- [ ] Linguistic interest
- [ ] Joy of learning
- [ ] Love for challenges
- [ ] Other...

In what types of situations do you use your languages? *

- [ ] Home
- [ ] Work
- [ ] Study
- [ ] Freetime
- [ ] Other...

How much time on average per week do you put into learning languages? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I hour or less	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	10 hours or more

When in your "home country", where and how do you acquire your language skills? *

- [ ] Alone
- [ ] In interaction with other people
- [ ] At school
- [ ] At work
- [ ] On a language course
- [ ] By reading books
- [ ] By listening to music
- [ ] By watching movies
- [ ] Online
- [ ] Through other forms of media (TV, radio, newspaper...)
- [ ] Other...

If abroad, where and how do you acquire your language skills? *

- [ ] Alone
- [ ] In interaction with other people
- [ ] At school
- [ ] At work
- [ ] On a language course
- [ ] By reading books
- [ ] By listening to music
- [ ] By watching movies
- [ ] Online
- [ ] Through other forms of media (TV, radio, newspaper...)
- [ ] Through an exchange year/semester
- [ ] Through an internship
- [ ] Other...

If you have a partner with whom you do not share the same first language, what language do you use to communicate and on what basis?

Long answer text

If you have children, are you raising them in a multilingual environment? How and why?

Long answer text

Section 4 of 6

Identity and belonging

Description (optional)

How important is/are your first language(s) to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

What does/do your first language(s) mean to you? *

Long answer text

How do you define home? Where do you feel like you belong? Please specify. *

Long answer text

What value do the places you grew up in have for you? *

Long answer text

Do you call a certain country your "home country"? If yes, which one and on what basis? *

Long answer text

Do you feel patriotic about your "home country"? Please specify. *

Long answer text

How important are your second languages to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

Do you have emotional attachments to your second languages? What do they mean to you? *

Long answer text

If you have lived abroad as an adult, what value do these countries and cultures have for you? *

Long answer text

When learning/maintaining a language, how important is living abroad to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

Would you like to spend more time abroad than you have? If yes, what has prevented you so far? *

Long answer text

What are your future plans language-wise? Do you intend to live abroad or in other ways learn more about different cultures? *

Long answer text

Does knowing several languages make you feel cosmopolitan? Please explain how. *

Long answer text

Section 5 of 6

Self-image and values

Description (optional)

How have language skills affected your self-image? Are languages an important part of your identity and/or do they lift your self-confidence? How? *

Long answer text

How do you see yourself as a language learner? Do you consider yourself talented or special in some ways? *

Long answer text

How important is understanding different cultures to you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not important at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very important

Have language skills helped you understand people from other cultures better? Please explain how. *

Long answer text

How much do you value language skills in other people? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	○	○	○	○	○	A lot

Do you consider language skills an essential part of being an educated and well-rounded person? Please specify. *

Long answer text

Do you consider yourself well-educated, well-traveled and/or privileged? Please specify. *

Long answer text

Do you consider yourself a polyglot? Or multilingual? Or something else? *

- [ ] Polyglot
- [ ] Multilingual
- [ ] Other...

How do you define the term "polyglot"? *

Long answer text

When did you start identifying as a polyglot? Or if you do not see yourself as one, why is that? *

Long answer text

Why did you decide to join this Facebook group? *

Long answer text

Section 6 of 6

Practical matters

As this questionnaire is conducted through Google Forms, you accept that Google saves the information you provide.

In my research, all informants will be anonymized. What pseudonym would you like me to use when/if referring to you? *

Long answer text

If you would like to receive the final work from me, please give me your email address.

Long answer text